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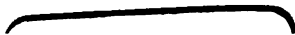
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A dark, stylized illustration of a mountain range with snow-capped peaks and dense evergreen trees in the foreground. The style is reminiscent of early 20th-century book cover art.

AN
ISLAND
IN - THE - AIR

ERNEST INGERSOLL

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“‘Suppose the boys and I take the ambulance and drive ahead.’”

AN
ISLAND IN THE AIR

A STORY OF SINGULAR ADVENTURES
IN THE MESA COUNTRY

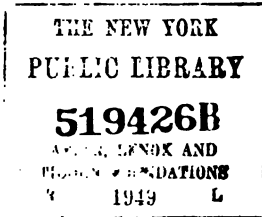
BY

ERNEST INGERSOLL

AUTHOR OF "THE ICE QUEEN," "KNOCKING 'ROUND THE
ROCKIES," "THE CREST OF THE CONTINENT,"
"WILD NEIGHBORS," ETC.

NEW YORK
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AN ISLAND IN THE AIR

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES THE MANNING OUTFIT

THE sun had to climb so high above the crest of the great hill eastward of the camp, that when its rays finally crept over and slid down through the aspens to pave the little yellow valley with new gold it was after eight by the watch — 8.20 A.M., July 4, 1853, to be precise.

This morning, however, no one cared how late the sun or anybody in the Manning outfit arose, since man and beast were for a few hours at rest. The day before had been one of hard travel, small accidents, toil and trouble, and the night a tur-

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moil of wind and water, which would have wholly disconcerted less experienced travellers in the wilderness than were these western pilgrims. But they knew how to make a camp secure in the roughest country and most unpromising circumstances. They knew well that July was the season for sudden and violent storms in the mountains, and that this was a danger to be guarded against every day. The three tents still stood firm, therefore, not to speak of the funny little one which sheltered old Hannah and her precious pots and kettles. Andy tried to scare her by saying they were just so many lightning attracters, but she simply said:—

“Go way, chile. De good Lawd’ll take care o’ ol’ Hannah, ’cause he knows you couldn’ get along nohow widout *her*.”

This stalwart old negress, who had been nurse to Mrs. Manning when she was a girl in Kentucky, and had half-mothered all her children, was busy at the fire, where a great caldron of water was steaming; and she had spread around her the outfit’s whole stock of kitchen and table ware and a pile of soiled clothing, while Cora was stretching a drying-line from tree to tree.

“I ’clare to goodness, Mistah Reilly,” she was saying to John with great good nature, as that man-of-all-work sauntered up to the fire to get a

light for his pipe, "'deed an' I'm pow'ful glad, 's fur's I'm discerned, dat the big wagon done broke down in dis creek las' night, do' missy did get sich a shake-up and skeer—'twon't hurt her none, I reckon. I jest ain' had no chanst to clean up since we lef' Santa Fee, and de Lawd knows when I'll have anodder. I didn' heah no call fer ol' Hannah to come out into dis mountainous wild'ness nohow—jes' like a pa'cel o' Israelites a-trapesin' off into the desert—but I hain't seen no quails yet!"

Her fat sides shook with a chuckle, and the Irishman grinned, and was very slow in lighting his pipe.

"Dar's Mars Rich'd an' Andy projeckin' somethin' right now. Mistah Reilly, ef yo' wants to keep on my sof' side, an' get some o' my special hot griddles to-night, jes' you please go an' tell 'em dey mus'n' on no 'count move out o' heah befo' to-morrow mawnin', 'cause I can't nohow get my washin' done befo' den."

John laughed and moved lazily away.

"Don't fret yourself, auntie. Fixin' that wagon-pole's job enough for one day. The steers need rest and feed, anyhow—and it'll take 'em all day to pick it up among these rocks."

"Mars Richard" was Captain Richard W. Manning, head of this family party—a tall,

strong-featured, intelligent American of perhaps fifty years, who impressed new acquaintances as a person accustomed to command, so that they usually surmised that he had been a soldier before they heard his title. There were officers and troopers still in the First Dragoons, U.S.A., who would tell you he had been a very good soldier indeed, and that it was a great pity he had resigned from the service; and there were Mexicans, who had survived the battles at Chapultepec and Cerro Gordo and elsewhere, who would never forget him or his troopers.

He is not thinking of that now, however, as he talks with a younger man, slighter and darker, but with the same intrepid look in the eyes, and evidently his son. Doctor Andrew Manning he had begun to hear himself styled in his Michigan town, before he had left that good old State three months ago; but here he is known to old Hannah and every one else simply as "Andy," except when John or Zeph hail him as "Doc." He is the oldest son of the family, and is just turned twenty-one; everybody was so anxious he should come with them, and begin his professional career in the rising civilization of California, that the emigration had been postponed a year in order that he might complete his studies. At this moment he is fondling his beautiful black setter

Nig, and smiling at the jealous efforts of Bimber, Cora's fox-terrier, to get a share of the caresses; but he listens attentively to his father's words.

"Andy," Mr. Manning is saying, "your mother was so shaken up by the tumble yesterday and the thunder-storm last night that it seems unwise to ask her to travel to-day. I think we had better stay where we are, for one day at least, and John and I can put in the time well in mending that broken wagon-pole."

"That suits me, for, if you don't need my help, I'd like to do a little hunting. They say these foot-hills are full of game — even bighorn sheep. I'd like mightily to get a good head!"

"Shouldn't wonder — go ahead and try it. I'm not complaining at the loss of a day; but the mischief is that this is no place to camp, even over night. There is almost no grass, and it won't do to let the stock run far, or the blamed Indians may stampede 'em. I expect there's more than one gang of red horse-thieves swooping around here on the watch for a chance at that game. Zeph was on watch last night, and says the horses ate hardly anything at all, and the cattle could find véry little."

"I say, father," exclaimed Andy, after a moment's thought, "it is the Fourth of July, and the youngsters have been wishing they might

make some sort of celebration. Suppose the boys and I take the ambulance and drive ahead a piece to better pasturage. I can hunt and they can have a picnic. You see, if we drive the four mules and ride our own horses, that will leave you only the cattle and your two saddle horses to 'find forage for.'

"I was going to propose that very thing," said his father, heartily.

"Oh, let us go with them, papa," cried Annie, stepping out of one of the tents as Cora came running up to add her pleading, and the eyes of both were glowing with expectation. "Mamma don't need us. Hannah can do everything for the few of you left—couldn't she, mamma?"

Lifting back the curtain of the tent she let the sunlight stream in and fall upon the cot where Mrs. Manning, a pretty, delicate woman, such as one would hardly expect to meet in such a place, lay with an expression of pain upon her face. But the thin features lighted up with a smile as she saw the eager countenances of her daughters.

"Yes, Hannah can attend to things well enough. I'm not going to be ill. But, Richard, do you think that it is safe?"

"Oh, no harm will happen to them—"

"Come on, Puss, if you want to," Andy broke in; "we'll need a cook to-night, anyhow. Put

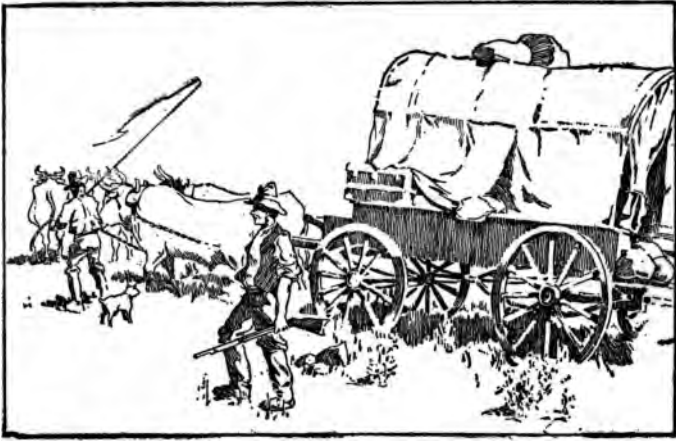
your beds and everything you've got in the ambulance just as usual. You know we won't come back here again."

Then he turned away to call the boys and help hitch up the mules.

Hannah fumed, of course, when she had to give up an unscoured share of the kitchen-ware.

"Huccumb Mars Richard agree to sich foolishness!" she grumbled; and then, seeing Annie's happy face, "There, there, go ahead, honey, and have lashin's o' fun — you don't get nuf sport for a young girl, I 'spect."

Annie kissed the old black face, and ran off to help Cora pack up.



CHAPTER II

GIVES THE READER SOME NECESSARY INFORMATION

EMIGRANTS like these, bound on the long wagon journey across the country to the gold-mines of California, were obliged to take almost a household of furniture with them, and enough food (except fresh meat) to last four or five months. In this matter Mr. Manning, being a person of means and experience, had provided for his family much more thoroughly than was the case with many of the overland emigrants of that time, who often suffered severely from their lack of preparation. Many, indeed, died of starvation and exposure, or escaped it only by the generosity of more wealthy or more provident travellers.

This party had been one of a large company which had come across the Plains together in order to protect each other against the raiding Kiowas, Comanches, and other Indians, which in those days infested both the northern and the southern highways. This company had followed the latter — the old Santa Fé trail, practically the present line of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fé Railroad. At Bent's Fort, near where now stands the railway station of Las Animas, Colorado, a few had turned off to the new Pike's Peak diggings, but the main body had kept on to Santa Fé, where a general halt for rest and refitting took place, as this was a large town with a military garrison, horse market, stores, a farming neighborhood, and so forth. Thence, after a few days, the majority of the emigrants departed in a new train upon the long and dreary jaunt which remained for them across New Mexico and southern California. Arizona had not yet been separated and given a name.

Mr. Manning, however, detached his outfit from the rest, and decided to try to follow the old Spanish trail, which led up the Rio Grande, and then across what is now southwestern Colorado and eastern Utah to the valley of the Great Salt Lake, whence he would continue to Sacramento by the regular northern road, now closely followed

by the Union and Central Pacific railroads. This route would not only be a great saving of distance if it could be followed, as he believed it could, but would afford, as a whole, much better and more constant food and water for his large company of live stock, and a healthier and pleasanter region of travel, than the dry, torrid, alkaline, Apache-haunted country along the southern route, which for long distances was positive desert.

Manning had learned everything he could about this old trail, and in Santa Fé had talked with every Mexican and Indian he could meet who knew anything about it. He could do this, because he had learned to speak Spanish fairly well during his campaigns in Mexico, at the time of the late war between that country and the United States; and knowing how much use Andy would have for that language on the Pacific coast, he had urged and helped his son to acquire a "speaking acquaintance" with this beautiful tongue. Both of them, therefore, had busied themselves at every opportunity in interviewing all natives who might be supposed to know anything of the old trail to Salt Lake, made long before by exploring missionaries, and followed occasionally since by wandering trappers and traders.

The general opinion seemed to be that the way

—one could hardly call it a road—could be traced, and was practicable for wagons. No difficulty would be met as far as Taos or the upper Rio Grande Indian pueblos, such as San Juan or Isleta; and a highway, fairly well travelled, extended on northwestward through the scattered settlements and sheep ranches about Los Ojos Calientes, Abiquiu, and so over to the valley of the Chama.

But beyond that river, as all agreed, troubles might be expected, since then it became necessary to make one's way for many miles along and finally across the high mountains north of the San Juan River. The courses of this large river and of its tributaries lay in deep canyons, making the country near them impassable, even had not that whole region south of the mountains been the home of the Navajo Indians, which just at that time were thought to be ready for the warpath. The main difficulty anticipated was the destruction of the road in places, due to the fact that among high mountains freshets and landslides and snow avalanches are constantly occurring, and likely to tear a road to pieces or bury it under masses of débris. No one could tell what accidents might not have happened to this exposed and neglected trail, during the year or more which had elapsed since the last

man of whom they could hear had come over it.

But Mr. Manning reasoned that whatever way he journeyed, obstacles and dangers would be met; and decided he might as well face them here as elsewhere, since the saving which would reward success justified the risk. So they had come along thus far, and all had gone well until the day before this narrative opens, when a half upset of the big wagon had forced a halt for repairs in a place bad for the animals, upon which everything depended, and uncomfortable for themselves — barring Hannah. It gave them a foretaste of evils to come.

Now, a few more words are necessary as to the wagons and outfit, in order to understand fully what afterward happened; and I promise you shall have, before long, excitement and speed enough to make up for any present slowness in the story. But, I repeat, it is needful that you should be aware of certain things, in order to appreciate the curious situation which presently developed.

The principal vehicle was a fine specimen of one of those huge, canvas-covered "prairie schooners," which were so indispensable to families making the long journey across the western country half a century ago, and which may yet be seen in

the interior of South Africa and of Australia. It contained all the general property, and a great quantity of staple provisions, such as bacon, flour, cornmeal, dried fruit, coffee, etc. It was drawn by several yoke of oxen, which were driven by John; and it always had as a passenger the portly form of Hannah, whose incessant spats with John were the joy of the crowd; but the two were excellent friends all the same. Here, too, when it rained, would ride Carter, the baby of the family, — but a pretty substantial and hardy baby of fourteen years, — who regarded the expedition as a grand picnic, was on the lookout for an adventure every minute, and saw a good many in a small way. In pleasant weather he rode a steady old mare. So much for the freight wagon.

The other vehicle was a lighter wagon, drawn by four stalwart mules, and driven by Zeph, a strong, cheerful, bright-witted youth of seventeen, who was alone in the world, but for years had been a sort of chore boy for the Mannings, and came along as general helper. He had never had time to go to school much, but was fond of reading, eager to learn, and found everybody willing to help him. This wagon was really an extra-large and extra-well-built army ambulance, which Captain Manning had had constructed especially for

this trip, and had fitted with a series of cupboard-like chests, which opened by doors through the sides or end of the wagon box. Thus their contents could be reached without removing them from the ambulance, although they could be taken out, of course, at will.

Above these spacious cupboards was the especially comfortable chair-like seat where Mrs. Manning rode, behind the driver's bench; and behind that were two beds, like cots, with very short folding legs. These were strapped up against the side of the hood during the day, and at night were let down and the ambulance thus turned into a sleeping room for the girls, or, as more usually happened, the cots could be drawn out and placed in a tent.

These cots belonged to Andy's twin sisters, Cora and Annie, who, unlike most twins, were by no means closely alike, either in face or disposition, for Cora was dark and Annie was fair. Cora was energetic and boyish and the pet of her father, while Annie was domestic and quiet and the close companion of her mother. But you will know them better soon.

Now it was the custom to carry in the ambulance, besides the two tents, which were occupied one by the girls and the other by the brothers whenever a camp was made, the clothing trunks of all

and the boys' rolls of bedding; also the larger part of the things of daily use, such as the guns, ammunition, certain tools, and so on. Moreover, as it would be troublesome to unpack every day the stores of provisions in the general cargo, it had been the custom from the start to select from these stores, once a week or so, food enough for the next few days, and stow it in the convenient cupboards, in order to get at it handily night and morning.

Such a distribution of stores had been made on the very day before that on which this narrative began; and consequently the ambulance which the young people proposed to drive ahead for a few miles was well stocked — a circumstance not only of convenience to them at the moment, but which proved of the highest importance, as you will presently understand.



CHAPTER III

DESCRIBES THE CARELESS BEGINNING OF AN
UNFORESEEN JOURNEY

THE preparations for the start were quickly made. The boys' tent was forgotten till the last minute, and then left; but that occupied by the girls was quickly taken down, folded, and, with their cots, neatly stowed in their proper places in the ambulance, as well as the tightly strapped rolls of bedding of the three boys. Mrs. Manning's easy-chair was taken out and transferred to the big wagon, in which she would have to ride to-morrow; and so used were these people to gathering and storing the cargo that in fifteen minutes all was ready. The mules were hitched

The Careless Beginning of a Journey 17

up, the horses saddled and mounted, and with gay good-bys the crowd rattled off for what they regarded as only a day's excursion "just for fun," with the added zest of a bit of useful exploration. To-morrow, they thought, they would all be together again. Zeph drove, as usual, with Cora sitting beside him, but Andy, Carter, and Annie rode,—the latter on Chestnut, the fine little bay horse which the girls shared turn and turn about; and she rode on a man's saddle, astride of the horse, as her practical father had commanded his daughters to do. It is the only proper way for so long a journey. Mrs. Manning had invented a costume which was practically the same as long afterward young ladies adopted for bicycling, and called the "divided skirt." Bimber and Nig raced away ahead, as if they understood perfectly that this was a gala day, and never dreamed of the wonderful adventures in store for them.

With frequent halts to rest the mules, or to clear some obstruction from the old trail, here readily visible, the ambulance finally reached the head of the valley, and then moved slowly on westward, along a sort of bluff or terrace. Andy rode well in advance, so as to foresee any difficulty in time to avoid it, but the road continued fairly good. After an hour or two they reached

ground so high that the grand peaks of the San Juan Mountains, previously largely hidden by foot-hills, came fully into sight, revealing a semi-circle of very lofty, snow-covered, and strangely sculptured alps curving about the northern horizon, while southward stretched a rolling tableland of grassy and rocky hills, through which the rivers flowed in deep valleys with very precipitous walls. The travellers could easily understand now why it had been necessary to climb so high (here about seven thousand feet above the level of the sea), because they could see that if this had not been done they would have been stopped again and again by an impassable gorge, cut by some of the many rivers forcing their way down to empty into the Rio San Juan. This large river collects all these mountain streams and conducts their waters, through a series of narrow canyons (toward the last, thousands of feet deep), to deliver them to the great Rio Colorado. Any good map will show the reader how these rivers run.

About eleven o'clock they descended into a little valley where there was a fordable stream and good grass, and where lovely groves of pines, cottonwoods, and willows made the scene exceedingly pleasant.

"By gum!" exclaimed Zeph, as he drove skil-

fully down the slope, "this'd be a bully place to camp. Feed enough for the whole outfit here, and I'll bet there's trout in that creek!"

Every one saw the truth of this; but while they were discussing it, and the mules were being watered, a Mexican hunter suddenly appeared, coming from the other side of the valley, leading a packhorse loaded with deerskins and other trophies, including the hide and horns of a mountain sheep.

That interested Andy immensely, and when he learned that by going on about two miles they would reach the summit of a ridge, along which it would be easy to reach a promontory of the range where sheep were pretty sure to be found, Andy was eager to go on, for *he* was bent on a hunting trip. The Mexican said he had just come down from that part of the mountains; and that the place he mentioned would furnish a fair camp-ground, with plenty of grass. When they asked him about the condition of the trail beyond, he professed he knew nothing about it, but said he had heard it was much washed out and in bad shape. They told him about their father's party, and he willingly promised to take a note. So Andy wrote a few lines, saying what he proposed to do, and adding: "The way in advance seems so rough and uncertain that I think I will go

on ahead a few miles to-morrow, and then try to report to you by one of the boys what I discover, so that your big wagon won't get into trouble. I think you will probably camp to-morrow night in this valley and perhaps decide to remain a day or two to give the oxen a good feed."

Giving the hunter a slab of the tobacco which they carried for just such purposes, they saw him trot off, and then made haste to the top of the ridge he had indicated, where they halted and prepared to camp beside a little brook, cold as ice, which came tumbling down straight from the snow-fields. A few old pines were grouped about it, and the soil was clothed with grass, but too thinly, to satisfy Zeph, whose first thought was always for the welfare of the animals.

"I can get along anyhow," he would explain, "but them mules has got to have good feed every day. A fellow can write 'Pike's Peak or Bust' on his wagon-sheet all he wants to, but it'll be 'bust' dead sure unless he looks out mighty well for his stock."

Annie immediately requisitioned Carter's help and hurried to make a fire and a hot luncheon, but Andy declined to wait for this luxury.

"Give me some pilot biscuit and a handful of dried peaches," he said, "and I'll get away as soon as possible."

“Let *me* go, too!” the crowd shouted in chorus, though nobody expected to do anything of the kind.

“Oh, I should be delighted, of course, but you seem to misunderstand me. I am not intending to drive all the game out of the mountains, but to get one little old ram if I can—a specimen of the American argali, *Ovis canadensis* of the naturalists. Hence, my dears, you must pardon me if I say, without intending any reflection upon your good society, that I propose to go alone.”

And with this stately announcement the young man picked up his rifle and stalked off.

Nig strained at her collar and howled because she had been tied to a wagon wheel, and every one said she expressed their sentiments perfectly.

Then they got a nice luncheon and amused themselves for the afternoon with gun and rod, rambling and loafing to their hearts' content. The girls thought it a good time to try making bread camp-fashion, as they had seen Hannah do many times, but had never attempted alone. Said Annie:—

“I just thought I'd try it, and took Hannah's moulding cloth on the sly. I expect she'll *rave* when she finds it out, and I'll catch it to-morrow.”

With a shovel she scooped a little hollow, as big as a wash-bowl, in the ground, near the fire,

and spread over it a floury square of canvas. Then she brought a quantity of flour, some cream of tartar, and bicarbonate of soda (which in those days took the place of modern baking-powder), and began to mix and mould in the canvas-lined hollow sufficient dough for a large loaf. The canvas served all the purposes of a big tin bread-pan, and had the great advantage of being much lighter and, when folded up, of taking almost no room in the luggage.

When her dough was mixed she placed it in a skillet (that is, a frying-pan — the most useful utensil in camp-cookery), covered it with a tin plate, and placed it on the bed of coals which had been made ready. Then coals were heaped on the cover, and the girls sat down and chatted for fifteen minutes or so, by which time they concluded this part of the baking had gone far enough. Then, with much curiosity as to results, they brushed the fire and ashes off the cover, drew the skillet-oven off the fire, and poked the cover away. The loaf had risen beautifully, and was a fine golden yellow.

“It’s all right,” cried Annie, joyfully. “Now for the finish.”

Turning it out of the pan, she set the round, cake-like loaf on edge, as near the fire as she could, and propped it up with a stick, where it hardened and browned more and more. Every

few moments she turned it around, and so when Andy came back with the head, hind quarters, and short ribs of a fine bighorn ram on his shoulders, and some cutlets had been broiled to add to the rest of the supper, the loaf was hot and crisp and brown.

“Finest bread in the world,” said Zeph, “for the fellow that likes crusts.”



CHAPTER IV

CELEBRATES A ROCKY MOUNTAIN "FOURTH"

WHAT a jolly supper it was!

"Why, it's just like a picnic," Carter declared; and then: "Say, Andy, tell us now how you shot this old sheep. This meat is prime!"

"Tastes like a cross between venison and mutton," was Zeph's opinion.

So while they enjoyed the cutlets of bighorn mutton the hunter recounted his adventures, stopping now and then to point to the heights where he had out-generalled a wily old king of the timberline ridges, whose massive spiral horns made a trophy which he kept all his life.

"I could see the smoke of your fire from several

points," he told them, and the fact seemed to bring the story nearer.

Suddenly a chill wind fell upon them from the crags and peaks, which unnoticed had changed to a hard bluish gray, in which already most of the features were lost in a pall of shadow.

"Whew!" Andy exclaimed, as he sprang to his feet and looked around at the quick-gathering darkness, "if we don't hurry and make our beds before it gets much darker, we'll be sorry before morning."

"Ours are already nicely fixed inside the wagon," said Annie. "Come on, Cote, let's hang up this bedroom curtain we've been using for a table-cloth, and then wash the dishes. Is the water hot?"

For a few moments every one was busy. Then, when the cooks no longer required any service of the fire, the embers were raked together, logs piled on, and, wrapped in coats and shawls, all settled about the cheerful blaze for a talk.

"I wonder if they have as big a blaze as this at papa's camp," said Carter.

"And *I* wonder," Annie continued, "whether mamma is able to sit outside and enjoy it. What is so nice as a big camp-fire? And we've never had a better one since we left the Kansas bottoms."

No one spoke again for a time, for all felt a

bit serious in meeting this first experience in being away by themselves over night, and in the presence of those mountains upon which their eyes and fancy had been fixed for so many days. Even Bimber wanted to stay close by his mistress, and growled suspiciously at every sound. The huge peaks themselves, whose lofty outlines blotted out a great part of the northern and western sky which elsewhere was incrustated with the most brilliant stars they had ever seen, were almost terrible in their nearness and magnitude, and led all thoughts toward the scenes that awaited the travellers beyond their passes, and the adventures that were to come. The journey seemed, somehow, much more formidable than it had in the morning sunshine.

“Well, this is a great old Fourth,” exclaimed Carter. “I’ll bet the boys back home are raising Ned about now with fire-crackers an’ torpedoes and spitting devils.”

“Bless me!” cried Andy at this, “I forgot you, boy,” and he jumped up and ran to the wagon, where he lighted a lantern and disappeared inside. Then they saw him climb out, stop a minute doing something with the lantern, and suddenly there was a fizz and a bang.

“Fire-crackers!” yelled the delighted lad, and was off with a rush.

"I thought of this just before we left home and put half-a-dozen packs in my trunk, and then mighty near forgot 'em."

So here in the great lone Rockies they had a real Fourth, and all hands popped fire-crackers among the rocks and sage-bush and great pines, with jokes and laughter until they were gone.

"I never dreamed of fire-crackers," said Carter, as the last one went off in a burst of red fire; "and I was going to make a big spitting devil."

"Do you know how?" Andy asked.

"You bet. I've made 'em lots of times."

Then they donned their cloaks and gathered round the fire again.

"Let's talk about what we are going to do when we get to California," cried Cora, cheerily. "I am going to fit myself to be a school-ma'am."

"And every time you lick a lad the gold dust'll fly out of his pants like a cloud!"

This was Zeph's idea.

"Then," laughed Annie, "you must dismiss school right away, and sweep it up very carefully."

"I'm afraid that would shorten up every day so much that your pupils wouldn't have time to learn anything," said Andy, "and pretty soon you'd be dismissed yourself. What you would better do is to save all the naughty ones to a single day, say once a week. Then spread down

a sheet and dust 'em on that right down the list. Then you'll get all the gold at once, and can just gather it in the centre of the cloth and pour it into your dinner pail."

"I can tell you a better plan than that," Carter put in. "Just announce at the start that you wouldn't tan the hide of any fellow if he would give you a nugget. I expect they find lots of 'em — use the roundest ones to play marbles with, as like as not. If a boy hadn't done much, so that you would only hit his hand a crack or two, why he'd have to pay only a little nugget; but if he'd been awful bad, so that you felt he deserved a regular whaling, then soak him for a big lump of gold — big as a walnut, or something like that."

"Why, you little heathen!" exclaimed his sister, indignantly, though she couldn't help laughing. "I wouldn't do such a thing. That would be downright meanness and robbery."

"Oh, I don't know. It would just be a fine instead of a stick. That's what judges often do. They say you can go to jail for ten days or else you can pay ten dollars. What's the dif?"

"There's a heap of difference. The judge isn't acting on his own motion, but according to the laws; and, what's more, the fine don't go into his own pocket. If it did, how long do you suppose it would be before most judges would be

arresting and fining people whenever they wanted cash, and then what would be the good of our courts? That's the way they do things in China and Morocco and such places, and we say the magistrates there are all corrupt and mere robbers; and that's what the neighbors would soon say of *me*, and I guess they'd send me packing, *quick!*"

"There, young man, that settles *you!*" came from the other side of the fire, where Andy was stretched out comfortably wrapped in a horse-blanket like an Indian.

"Well, if Cote is too high and mighty to pound the gold out of her bad boys and give it to me, I've got to find some other scheme to get money, for I am going to need a pile of it."

"Guess about two bits a week'll answer *your* needs for a while," growled Zeph, with deep contempt.

"Huh! Much *you* know about it! Soon's I get to California, and we get settled a little, I'm going to look round and find good places, and start an express business. I read about a young fellow named Adams, who, only a few years ago, began travelling back and forth every day between New York and Boston carrying parcels. First off he only had a carpet-bag; and then he had to take a trunk. Pretty soon he hired a boy to help him,

and in about three months he had a whole state-room full of stuff each way on the boats, and inside of a year he had a big business going, and now they say he's got cars on the railroads and is a rich man. That's the way I'm going to work in California, carrying gold and groceries and things back and forth between San Francisco and the mining camps—but it will take a lot of money. You better come in with me, Zeph. I'll make you my wagon-boss, and we'll make a lot of money."

"No, sir; not till I've tried the mines. As soon as Mr. Manning gets fixed and can let me go, I'm goin' prospectin'. He says if the wages comin' to me are not enough to give me a good start, he'll lend me a grub-stake. Ginger! I wish we were *there!* There's an awful crowd goin' out. The mountains'll be just *full* of fellers huntin' fer lodes and placers."

"I allow they won't find 'em *all* before you get there, Zeph. The crowd doesn't seem to matter. They say some of the best strikes have been made right where people are thickest—even in the middle of towns. At any rate, *I* won't crowd you."

"What do *you* mean to do, Andy?" said Annie.

"Oh, you all know what my plans are. Speak for yourself, Nan."

"I'm going to stay with mamma, and help her keep house, and keep on practising with my violin. I don't suppose there is a piano in all California, at any rate outside of San Francisco. But tell us about your plans, Andy."

"Well, you know father has been talking about coming ever since the first rush four years ago; and the real reason why he has waited has been to give us all time to get more schooling. Just think how much better off you girls are for your chance to finish the high school and study your music and all that."

"I wish you could have gone on through college," Annie interrupted.

"Yes, I hated to quit that when I had just begun, but I got two years of the medical school and a year in the Detroit Hospital. That gave me my M.D., so that I can start pretty fair as a doctor now; and I've got an advantage over most of the young physicians there, I guess, in my knowing how to talk Spanish."

"That'll make the other fellows '*walk* Spanish,'" chuckled Carter.

"At any rate, it will give me a better chance to practise among the Mexican families. They say their own doctors do not amount to much, because all the really learned ones can make a living so much better in Old Mexico. I might have got a

lot of business in Santa Fé if I had cared to stay there."

"I noticed your Spanish came mighty handy when we got among these Indians down here."

"Yes, and it will be convenient all the time, for we've got a long ways to go yet."

"Say, I ought to be able to talk with the Greasers in my express business," exclaimed Carter. "Will you teach me to speak Spanish, Andy?"

"Of course, if you will stick to it. But it's getting late and we must go to bed."

So this hopeful and friendly circle broke up. The girls and Bimber climbed into their wagon bedroom; the boys rolled themselves in blankets near the wheels, Nig nestling down beside her master, and a few minutes later the sighing of the wind in the big yellow pines, the occasional whinnying of one of the picketed horses, or the howl of a distant coyote were the only sounds to be heard.



CHAPTER V

MARCHES THROUGH A MORNING'S TRAVEL

THESE young travellers had long ago learned the art of early rising. Here no overhanging hill intervened to shut out the sunlight until eight o'clock or more, as had been the case in their father's camp the day before. From the lofty ridge where they lay, they looked out toward the southeast almost as if upon a sea, so smooth and low and apparently perfectly level were the misty plains of the Rio Grande valley in that direction. Only a narrow outlook, to be sure, was so free to the eye, but just there was where the sun rose; and the flame-colored glow at the edge of the sky there showed that the "glorious

orb of day” would very soon appear, when the camp was aroused by a fierce reveille, very bad as to tune and shrill as to sound, but the best Zeph could do on his penny tin whistle. The performer was sitting up in his blankets.

“Oh, shut up!” growled Carter. “What do you want to wake everybody up for in the middle of the night?”

The boy didn’t mean to misstate the case. He simply had not yet been able to open his eyes to see the blushing dawn.

Andy said nothing, but he reached for a boot and hurled it at the disturber, who dodged, breaking his tune in the middle. Bimber came pitching out of the wagon like a rocket, exploding in a shower of defiant barks, and Nig sprang from her dreams ready to back him against anything and everything; while a voice in the ambulance picked up the dropped reveille and sang it:—

“ I c-a-n’t get ’em up,
 I c-a-n’t get ’em up,
 I c-a-n’t get ’em up in the m-o-r-ning.

The captain’s worse than the s-a-a-r-geant,
 The major’s worse than the ca-a-ptain,
 The colonel’s worse than ’em all.”

And they laughed to hear applause come back from the hillside in a loud *he-haw* of greeting from the chilly mules, which were right glad to

see some signs of life, and were longing for the warmth of the sun on their unblanketed backs.

"Great Cæsar!" drawled Andy, stretching his arms in a mighty yawn; "I certainly do hate to get up, but I suppose I must."

Then he genially hurled the other boot at the buffalo robe which made a furry mound of Carter, and that sleepy youngster gave a great howl, and fought like a tomcat when Zeph attempted to pull him out.

Ten minutes later the sun lifted itself like the blaze of a huge fire over the edge of the earth. It suddenly peopled the shadowy plain with hundreds of unseen hills and valleys, and gilded with a magic and most delicate brush the snowy heads of the sierra till they glowed like titanic crystals of rose quartz. All hands were wide awake now, up and busy, — Zeph on his way to look after the horses, Carter bringing water from the icy brook, and the girls at the fire; but all paused a moment to regard the spectacle in the east.

How truly wonderful — how amazing — would we think the grandeur of a sunrise, did we gaze upon it only once in a lifetime, or even in a year! Who, *then*, would complain of being awakened early to behold it?

All the same, the morning air was chilly, and everybody was glum except the irrepressible

Zeph, so that not much was said until Annie's coffee and Cora's bacon had half disappeared, and the fire and the sunshine together had limbered folks a little. Five o'clock in the morning on the shoulder of the Rockies, even in mid-July, is no time for hilarity — scenery or no scenery.

"We ought to get pretty well along to-day after this early start," said Andy, cheerfully.

"I'm glad we *are* going on," Cora exclaimed. "It's good fun, and I'm sure it will help papa to steer the big wagon. It looks like a rougher road over there than we travelled yesterday," and she glanced along the mountains toward the west.

"Bet your boots!" mumbled Zeph, through a mouthful of bread. "Shouldn't wonder if we had to do some road-making if what that Greaser said is true, — eh, Andy?"

"Very likely, so let's get moving as soon as possible. Carter, you roll up the bedding and help the girls stow the things, while Zeph and I hitch up."

Twenty minutes later the expedition had resumed its march, Andy lingering to write and post in a conspicuous place by the fire a note to his father, telling why they had thought it best to go ahead another day and explore the road.

The old trail could be followed easily at first, and though later they often lost it, there usually

seemed to be only one way to progress, and after a while they would see faint wagon tracks, which will remain visible for a surprising length of time on the gravelly ridges. Once they had to do a lot of shovelling to enable them to drag the wagon across a small sunken stream, and other difficulties occasionally occurred; but on the whole they got along very well and so rapidly that Zeph judged they must have come ten miles before a real obstruction presented itself. At a point where the trail was plain, they suddenly came against a deep, dry gulch, or *arroyo*, as the Mexicans say, which was quite uncrossable. They could see that it broadened and deepened downward, showing that nothing was to be gained in that direction, so Andy rode up to the right toward the mountains to examine the banks there. In a few minutes he returned and called to the rest to come on.

The way was rough and pretty steep, but the four mules set themselves to the work well, and soon the wheeling improved. The gulch became steadily narrower and shallower, as they ascended, and after a quarter of a mile or so was only like a big ditch. At this point a ridge of rock barred the way, and the ambulance could be taken no farther.

“It’s here or nowhere,” said Andy. “We’ll have

to get out the pick and shovel and dig a road across."

So the young men went at work while Annie held the reins and Cora slipped off Chestnut's back and helped Carter gather sticks to fill into the bottom of the trench. Suddenly Andy threw down his mattock and took out pencil and notebook.

"Cora," he called, as he wrote a few lines on a leaf and tore it out, "here is a note for father, advising him to turn up here when he reaches the arroyo. I want you to take it down to the place where we first struck this plaguy ravine and stick it in the end of a split stick, which you can set up in the road where he will see it. Wait — I'll cut you a post."

So, split stick and note in hand, the girl remounted her pony and cantered off, never giving a thought to either danger or loneliness.

By the time she came back the boys had completed their work, the tools were put away, Zeph gathered up the reins, and, with a rush and a halloo, the splendid team kept out of the way of the heavy vehicle as it pitched down the slope, and then nobly hauled it up the bank on the other side.

Half a mile farther on they came to a pleasant shady spot beside a mountain torrent, and stopped

for a noonday rest, as much needed by the animals as by themselves. The mules were unharnessed, the riding horses unsaddled and turned loose. There was little danger of their straying, but, to make sure, the old mare ridden by Carter was picketed by a long rope ; for where she was the mules and other horses would stay. That's the way with a train of animals — especially mules. They form an attachment to a leader and cling to that one animal with a dog-like affection, so that, unless stampeded by some great fright, the owner may be sure of his herd as long as he keeps their leader.

This matter arranged, every one threw themselves on the ground under a tree and ate the crackers, cold bacon, and dried fruit, washed down with snow-water, which had been saved from breakfast — just a snack, but satisfactory until the “square meal” of the evening's camp.

It was now very hot. The wind had become still, the sun beat straight down, and the air shimmered with a thousand tiny flickering currents rising from the baked rocks and ground, where the grass stems had already dried into golden wires, yet were good to eat, for the hungry mules gnawed eagerly at the tufts. This sun-cured forage was one of the gramma grasses, whose flat seed-head grows on one side of the summit of the stalk like a little flag.

"The earth is like a red-hot stove," said Annie, with a sigh, as she laid her head on Cora's knee, and gazed off at the yellow landscape. "There is not a breath of a breeze. I thought it would always be cool up here in the mountains."

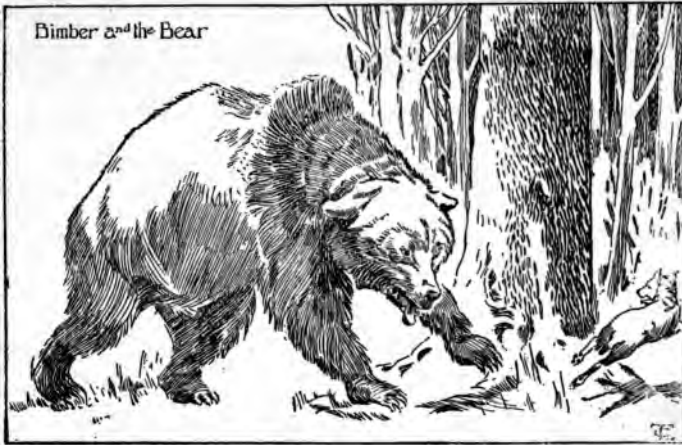
"Well," Andy replied, "you know we are not exactly *in* the mountains, but only up on their warm southern slope. I guess it *is* usually cooler and more windy here than to-day; and it looks to me as if we might have a thunder-storm before night."

"Oh, I hope not!"

"I think I'll take a bit of a walk," said Carter, after a little while. "Maybe I can find a partridge or something."

He rose lazily, took from the wagon his light shot-gun, and, whistling to Bimber, strolled off up the mountain side.

"I won't be gone long," he called back, as he went off, and nobody objected to his going.



CHAPTER VI

PUTS A BEAR TO FLIGHT

CARTER and Bimber soon reached the top of a sloping ridge and walked along it some distance, then turned down on the other side toward a grassy place which looked as if it might be good for birds, but saw none. A little farther on they overlooked a bit of a valley, and there caught sight of a hawk's nest in a tree standing by itself, which looked climbable. This was something to be examined, and with Bimber at his heels, the lad ran down toward it, but found it farther away than he expected. When he finally reached it, he found the limbs far too high for him to grasp, and the trunk too large to "shin" easily; but

breaking down a small dead tree near, he made use of it as a ladder, and was soon scrambling through the branches. Meanwhile Bimber had become interested in a large burrow, probably of a badger, whose front door was between two big roots, and with true terrier enthusiasm began at once to force his way into it.

Carter reached the nest and was intent upon its four big brown-blotched eggs, when he heard Bimber begin barking furiously.

“I expect he’s found something at home. Wish he’d get his head bit off!” thought the boy, savagely, but of course not meaning it at all.

The racket continued and seemed to go away and come back. Lowering his head below the nest to find out what was going on, the boy forgot those eggs *instanter*, for he saw a full-grown bear come loping over the prairie chasing that fool of a dog, who was *ki-yi-ing* and doing his level best to reach the tree.

Here was a scrape for a youngster!

The bear was as big as an elephant, or seemed so to the boy. It was whining and grunting savagely as it ran.

“Oh!” thought Carter, “if only I were a hawk, like that one in the sky, or a horse that could gallop away, or even a dog like Bimber—but where *is* Bim? I can’t see him or hear him.

Has the bear caught him? No, I must have seen it."

This worry was driven out of mind by another horrible thought. What kind of a bear was this — could it climb a tree? The grizzly could but a black bear couldn't — or was it the other way round? And how was he to know which kind was this monster, nosing grumpily around under him. He was dull brown, — neither black nor grizzly in coat. Maybe it was a cinnamon — and could the cinnamon bear climb? Cracky! he was going to try it. The great brute slowly reared himself on his haunches and began clawing at the trunk; and the boy scrambled higher and higher with each grunt until he was hiding behind the hawk's nest. And when the animal heard this noise in the branches, and caught sight of the fugitive, it gave a roar and stretched up so tall that Carter's teeth chattered with fear that it would reach the first branches and haul itself up.

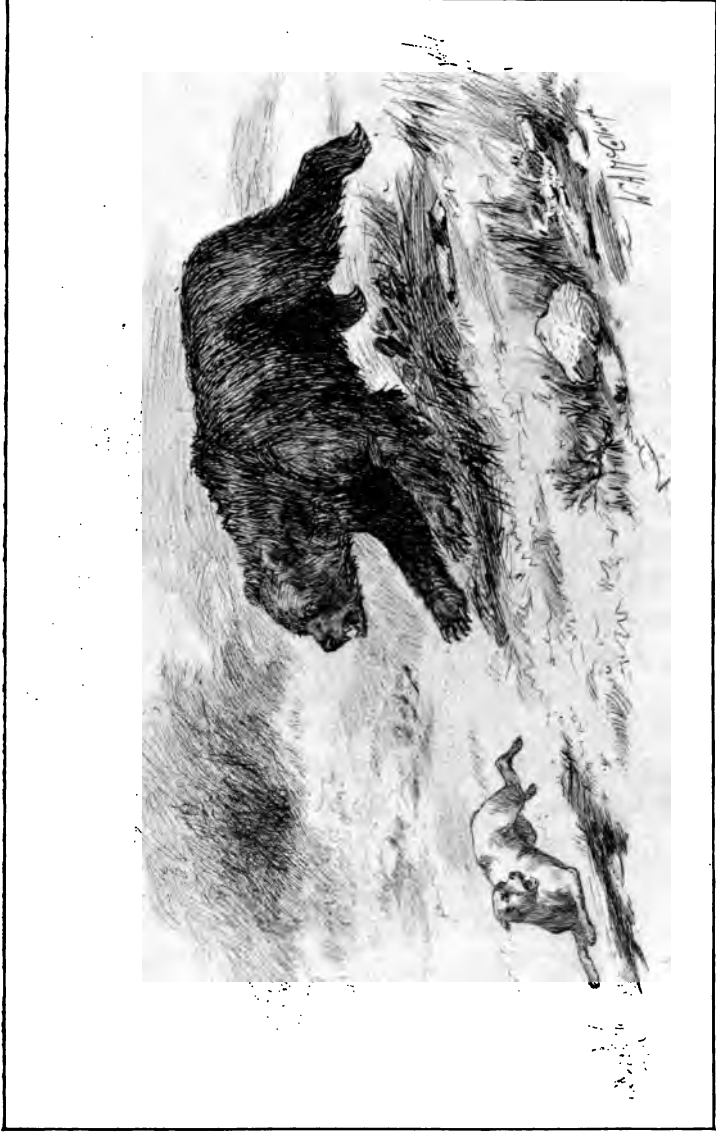
Then excited barking came to his ears, but in a queer muffled tone, as if the dog were far away; yet no glimpse of his white coat could be caught anywhere, though Carter looked in all directions. Next the barking would ring out sharp and clear, close by, and the bear would give a roar. It was most puzzling.

"Where the mischief is Bimber?" the boy

kept asking himself, so much interested he almost forgot his own perils. The answer came quickly, when the bear had sauntered away a few yards. The terrier suddenly appeared, facing his big enemy and scolding the best he knew how. The grizzly made a dash, but the dog was twice as agile, and in a twinkling was safe in that burrow between the roots. The bear's nose was not far from the terrier's stub tail when he entered; but, on the other hand, Bimber's teeth were unpleasantly close to Bruin's stub tail the moment the latter turned away. If it came to a question of tails, there was not much chance for either to brag!

As long as Old Ephraim stood on guard Bimber stayed in the hole barking defiance out of the depths of it, but never showing his nose. The moment Bruin left that spot the terrier would sally out, snap at him, and scud back to his intrenchments. The bear tried to reach in—first one paw and then another, and drag its tormentor out, but such tactics were of no avail. The dog retreated till Carter could scarcely hear his voice, and never ventured within reach of those formidable claws.

Suddenly the animal's eye fell upon the shotgun leaning against a rock near by, and it rushed upon it, seizing it with teeth and paws and smash-



“The grizzly made a dash, but the dog was twice as agile.”

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ing the stock and bending the barrels—good steel though they were.

This provoked Carter beyond endurance. He bethought him of his pistol, which in the excitement he had quite forgotten. It was a small double-barrelled, muzzle-loading pop-gun that had afforded him some amusement as a means of scaring birds and cottontails, and which he carried on his belt in imitation of his father and John, who wore big dragoon "horse-pistols," but which even he himself had never seriously believed to be of any account for practical work.

"Maybe I can scare the beast off anyhow," he thought, and let drive.

The bear gave a howl, as the little bullet stung his shoulder, and, dropping the gun, came back to the tree, where it reared up and got the charge from the other barrel, making a scalp wound, which brought just such language as one might expect from a mad bear with a sore head; and at the same instant Bimber got in a good nip at a hind leg.

This last impudence was too much. Bruin was thoroughly enraged. He tore away at the mouth of the burrow, as if he meant to dig the dog out, but the great roots were in the way and before long he gave it up, and, as if deciding upon a siege, since an assault was of no use, lay

down squarely across the mouth of the hole and began rubbing his smarting pate.

If Carter had had plenty of ammunition, he might, perhaps, have worried the bear into leaving the place, by incessantly pelting him with bullets; but, alas! he had hung his heavy bullet pouch upon a bush before beginning his climb.

For half an hour or so the boy sat there hoping some one would come to his rescue, while the bear sat still, growling and snarling, and Bimber continued barking from somewhere in the depths of the earth. Carter kept hoping that his friends would appear, but the horizon was never darkened by a human form. Was he to be kept perched astride of that miserable branch all night?

Not if he could help it. He set himself to think of some stratagem, and thought to such good purpose that straightway one occurred to him. He nearly jumped off the limb, in delight at the idea, before he remembered where he was.

His powder flask was still hanging round his neck. Unscrewing its neck he poured into his left hand as much powder as he could conveniently hold, and replaced the cap on the flask. Reaching up to the nest, he lifted out one of the eggs, broke it gently, and let a little quantity of the "white" run into the powder in his hand. This done, he mixed the two together, adding more of one or

the other until he had formed a paste that suited him. This he shaped into a kind of cord around a ravelling torn from his coat, coiled it closely, and laid it on the branch beside him to dry. This was a "spitting devil," such as he had often used to make for Fourth-of-July fun : and in the same way two more were prepared.

Bimber, tired out, discouraged, and half smothered, had quit barking. Bruin had quieted down and was apparently asleep.

With as little noise as possible Carter crept down to the lowest limb, where he was directly over the huge mass of fur, and twisted his legs round the limb so as to leave both hands free. Holding the three "devils" in his hand, he took a match from his pocket and lighted them rapidly, then dropped the blazing things, one after another, upon the dozing beast below him.

If Bruin noticed them at all, he doubtless supposed some twigs had fallen upon his back ; but before long their fizzing and snapping woke him up, and the next minute began to warm him well — especially one, which had caught firmly in the ruff about his neck, and another in the long hair upon his haunches. These began to sputter and burn as the fire caught grain after grain of the powder, and the bear grew frantic with amazement and pain. He rolled over and over, but

only ground the devils deeper into his fur, while Bimber, aroused by the rumpus, rushed out and added his voice to the commotion. Suddenly a terrific explosion rent the air and nearly knocked Carter off his perch with surprise. The bear, in floundering about, had sat down upon the gun, and, entangling the hammers in its fur, had discharged it; but the barrels were bent, and, of course, the gun had burst.

That was the finishing touch. Stinging and panic-stricken with the powder on his back and the explosion in his rear, the beast galloped away at the top of its speed, and Carter believes it ran straight over the mountains, for he never saw or heard of it again.

How they laughed when the lad came running in and told his story — that is, after they had done scolding him for the scare he had given them, and the delay he had caused; and it was a long time before he heard the last of it.

The loss of his shot-gun grieved him; but fortunately there was another in the ambulance.



CHAPTER VII

DISCLOSES ANOTHER MOUNTAIN TRAVELLER

ON this same hot summer day another traveller was taking his nooning. He was some miles away, to be sure, and down where the plain began to sweep up toward the base of the mountains,—by no means so pleasant a place as where our friends were halting.

Where he loitered the outermost of the foothills rose into a great rounded ridge, which from a distance would look as smooth as a lawn; but should you climb it, you would find it to be studded with rocks rising from a gravelly soil, and often rasped by the dust-armed wind into strange grotesque forms, like caricatures of monu-

ments, or of gigantic toadstools, or of cottages, boats, or almost anything you might fancy. Between these fantastic rocks was a sparse growth of sage-brush and greasewood, low cactus, and various sour weeds, all gray as the rocks and the soil, and as dry as a bone. Yet small brown birds flitted from harbor to harbor among the thorny scrub, and butterflies danced and curveted in the hot sunshine, finding flowers on the prickly pears, and various humble blossoms near the ground; and gayly striped lizards darted after the insects, whose buzzing filled the air with a keen, never ceasing noise which seemed the voice of the heat and the desert.

Sitting in the shadow of one of the quaint rocks, not far from the line of crags along the crest of the hillside, was an aged Indian, as motionless as the block of sandstone, and, in his soiled clothing of buckskin, almost as colorless. The very lizards played about his feet without noticing his presence. His eyes swept the breadth of the valley and down, down, long miles and hundreds of feet, to where the slope gently flattened out into the floor of the valley. This olive-green valley narrowed and rose rapidly at his left toward the hills, but opened southward as far as he could see, and was bounded on each side by broken cliffs, which seemed to grow taller and

taller as they receded, for the valley-canyon sank lower and lower and lower between them in its descent toward the Rio San Juan.

The old man was intently watching something near the head of the valley, — a group of figures clustered about a still smaller circle seated upon the ground. Some of them wore brightly colored robes or clothing, as red as the cactus blossoms; and now and then one would run out and herd up the little band of horses feeding near by, as if to prevent their straying too far away.

The Indian knew perfectly well who were these figures in this lonely valley of rocks and dust and fierce sunlight, knew them as well as he knew the coyote sneaking stealthily from shadow to shadow halfway between him and them. He was hundreds of miles from home, but he could tell you the native names of this valley, and of the abrupt lofty hills on each flank of it, and of the large, misty hollow into which it opened far away toward the south. The courses of the streams, or places where streams would run for a while after a rainfall, the positions of the springs and water-holes, the name of each of the snowy mountains that upheld a wall of peaks across the head of this and other bare and waterless gorges — all these were familiar to him.

“When will those ruffians of Navajos finish

that nonsense and go away," he growled to himself. "Who else, except maybe a dog of an Apache, would waste his time at noonday in playing with little painted sticks on a blanket in the sun? And that storm will cut me off if I do not hasten—see it gathering on the mother-mountains! Ah, they go!"

It was no wonder that he was tired and out of patience, for it was now past the middle of the afternoon, and the lone watcher was both in haste to reach the goal of many a long day of hard foot-journey (the old man was very weary), and because he was fearful of the glowering skies in the north.

But at last the Navajos were really rising and moving about. Probably they could see as well as he the threat of storm in the frown upon the mountains, and knew it was time to get farther away from the range, or, perhaps, find shelter in some camp where their families had by this time set up their elk-hide tepees. One threw over his shoulder the gaudy blanket, upon which they had been gambling, and another trod out the tiny fire, whose wisp of smoke had been wavering over the embers like an uneasy ghost. Then one by one they threw themselves upon their horses and cantered off.

"Go they up or down?" the watcher asked

himself with breathless interest, shading his eyes with a sinewy hand as he fixed his gaze intently upon their movements, for the answer to this question made the greatest difference to him; and when they turned *down* the valley, he uttered an exclamation of relief and joy, and slipped away from the shadow of the rock so silently that the lizards kept on playing in the sunshine unmindful of his departure.

With astonishing agility he sped along the hillside toward the narrowing head of the great arid ravine, ever and anon casting anxious glances at the towering heights ahead, for he still had several miles to walk.

“The storm grows in the mountains, and is sweeping downward,” he muttered again and again. “Are the rain gods angry? Never before have they met me with such frowns, yet I have come in time, and have forgotten nothing.”

It was thus distressfully that he saw one after another of the peaks blotted out by black clouds, which every moment settled lower and lower; and he quickened his pace to his utmost.

Near the head of the valley, which had now become a comparatively narrow and rocky canyon, he ran downward, crossed the dry watercourse in the bottom, and began to scramble up a gulch that formed a side ravine, gashing the steep eastern side

close to the head of the main valley. A rattlesnake lay coiled upon a little ledge, just where the man was to step, but he nimbly turned aside from it, and then halted a pace or two distant. Opening the wallet at his belt, he took from it a little coarse powder—was it tobacco? and tossed it toward the reptile. Then, raising his arms an instant, with a few words like a hurried prayer, first toward the tempest-hidden mountains and then toward the sun, which now was just dropping behind the western cliffs, he climbed onward with renewed haste.

The storm was almost at hand. The mountain range was wholly veiled in curtains of rain-clouds, constantly embroidered with the zigzag paths of the lightning. Thunder roared from peak to peak and rattled against the cliffs and echoed up and down the desolate canyons; and darkness as of night was gathering with surprising rapidity. But before the first drop of rain had splashed into the yellow dust, or the earliest whirl of the tornado had torn from its roots the weakest bush, the old man, breathless but successful, had reached the level brow of the hill and had disappeared among the trees that clothed it.



CHAPTER VIII

LECTURES US ON CLOUD-BURSTS, WITH AN ILLUSTRATION

TEN minutes after Carter had returned and been scolded, the party was again on its way, leaving another note to Mr. Manning telling of their progress. The road was smooth and gradually ascending, but after a couple of miles the wagon was obliged to turn out some distance to get around the head of a washout; and half a mile farther it was detained an hour in crossing another. The road was becoming increasingly difficult, and always rising, and about four o'clock the struggle over a third, though small, break in the line of the road snapped something in the har-

ness of the off-wheeler, and Zeph called "Whoa!" in a hurry. Andy instantly dismounted and ran to help, but Zeph said he could fix it in a few moments, and so all sat down and watched him. Naturally they began to talk of the situation.

"What makes these great gullies, Andy? I don't see any water in them, or anything like a stream."

"Why, Nan," he answered her, "they are cut out by one after another of the tremendous rainstorms which now and then fall here in summer. They don't come often, but when they do they are terrors. I hope this hot still day won't fetch one."

"What brings them in a dry country like this?" asked Zeph, as usual anxious to learn the science of things. "Don't look as if it ever rained here in a decent way."

"You fellows seem to be thirsting for information nowadays," laughed the doctor; "but I can tell you if you really want to listen to a lecture."

"Yes — tell us." And all gathered near enough for Zeph to hear as he tinkered at the harness — that is all, except Nig and Bimber. They were busy at a gopher-hole in the midst of a clump of sunflowers. Poor dogs! they were living on rather short rations these days, and had taken to hunting on their own account. It was a case of "root, hog, or die," as Carter put it.

“Well,” Andy began, “these snowy peaks we see are only a few of a great mass of mountains, as you know, some of them more than a mile in height above the plains and more than fourteen thousand feet above sea-level. They overlook a vast area of hot lowlands, which reach away off southward there into Mexico, not to speak of the deserts of Utah, west of them, which we have got to cross after a while — worse luck! The sun, beating day after day on these almost shadeless plains, heats the ground until the air rises from it in waves of heat like those off a hot stove, as Nan said this morning.”

“I can feel it now,” sighed Cora, fanning her face with her hat.

“This volume of hot air,” Andy went on, “is incessantly rolling upward and drifting against the mountain summits, whose snows it not only melts all summer long, but to a great extent absorbs, because it is very dry. The rivers, therefore, are steadily fed by this daily melting, but slowly (and more during the day than at night), so that they are small compared with those in a region of frequent rains.

“By this absorption of snow, increased by what moisture the high-blowing westerly winds bring from the Pacific, clouds are continually formed, and in early summer hang about the peaks, as

you see them up there now, discharging frequent showers of snow on the summits and of rain lower down, often with severe thunder and lightning.”

“Then why doesn’t it rain often about here?” some one asked.

“Because the strong, uprising currents of warm air from these great, extra-hot southern plains force the clouds back from this face of the range. But let me go on with my lecture, for we must hurry forward and find a comfortable camping-place. I am afraid we shall have what the preachers call ‘a practical illustration’ of my remarks before long.

“Now it sometimes happens in midsummer that the air over and about one range or group of mountains becomes heavily charged with vapor, and at the same time a similar state of things comes into action in a neighboring district. The vapor may be invisible—no clouds to be seen at all, or perhaps a very few clustered about some peak at sunrise, and soon disappearing. Now let these two masses of vapor-charged air gradually drift toward one another and get within striking distance, as it were. If their density and temperature and electrical condition are nearly the same, they may blend without much disturbance, but as a rule they are different, and the process of mixing when they meet raises such a

ruction as makes one fear a second flood is at hand. These tremendous and noisy downpours are never very widely extended, but when they happen the water, they say, seems to fall in masses, as though the bottom had dropped out of a cistern, and I don't wonder that mountain folks call them 'cloud-bursts.'

"And they say they rip things up most particular," ejaculated Zeph.

"Yes. You see, every bit of land in a mountain country is sloping one way or another, and much of it is hard rock and unforested. Every ridge sheds water like the roof of a house. Every hollow fills and overflows immediately. This overflow finds some little channel leading to a larger one, and in a moment torrents are leaping headlong, where before were dry and sandy gullies. These torrents join and gather, are constantly swelled by new cataracts, pitching and sliding down from cliffs and slopes, undermining rocks and trees, sweeping all the loose stuff away in a murky flood, and crushing rocks, logs, and boulders, or rolling them on with terrific noise and tumult.

"Dozens of the head-streams pour down and out of the high mountain ravines into the river-courses, where usually there trickle only shallow rills. The swollen flood rolls on with a grinding

roar, filling the channel to its brim, and the people say the river is *booming*. Now and then it breaks the banks and makes a new channel; or some small side ravine, weakened by the last flood, gives way, eaten at the base and worn by the current above, until in a few moments or few hours it has deepened and broadened into a great V-shaped gulch, dividing two new-born hills which yesterday were united in a continuous ridge-like summit, and — ”

“ There, that’s all honkidory,” interrupted Zeph, picking up the reins and climbing to the driver’s seat. “ Oh, beg pardon, professor, — go ahead.”

“ Don’t apologize,” Andy laughed back, as he rose. “ But, Nan, that’s the way these ravines have been cut in this mountain slope; and it is one of the ways in which all the mountains are gradually worn away.”



CHAPTER IX

DESCRIBES A CATASTROPHE AND A NARROW
ESCAPE

THE signs of a gathering storm, which had alarmed the Indian pilgrim down in the hot valley, and had already caused anxiety to our friends, were multiplying rapidly about the mountain tops. The northern sky was becoming filled with massive cloud-banks, which rose above into domes and towers glowing with sunlight, but below were fast hiding the summits behind a veil of dark and surging vapors. Puffs of cold wind swept down between the foot-hills, and now and then the gloomy mist-curtains would be rent asunder by a lightning stroke, revealing magnifi-

cent glimpses of the range. It was as if a series of splendid but fearful pictures had been set in the gallery of the sky, with the high mountains for their easels.

"Seems to me we'd better be a-huntin' camp," said Zeph, chirruping to his team. "If some o' these 'ere dry creeks don't get to boomin' before long, I'll say I'm a tenderfoot."

The mules were therefore urged to a faster gait, and the party pushed on, growing more and more uneasy, although the sun still blazed down upon them with a power that would have made the *shade* of the storm-clouds, at least, very agreeable. And, of course, the storm might expend itself wholly on the old hills so well used to it.

"They say this Rio Piedra we're coming to is a terror when it's up," Carter remarked, by and by; "and I'll bet you there's a lot of gulches leading down to it that ain't much less when a storm breaks, like that one a-buzzin' up there on the range."

"Where did you hear that?" Cora inquired, rather scornfully, as she ambled along beside him on Chestnut.

"Talked with a fellow in Taos, who had been up here hunting, and he seemed to think we'd undertaken a pretty big job in trying to go West by this route."

While he was speaking they came to the end of a long ridge which for some time had cut off their view ahead, and turned to pass around its projecting foot. As they did so they found themselves at the head of the largest ravine they had yet seen. Up here, to be sure, it was merely a gully, across which, after half an hour's shovelling and filling, the team dragged the wagon with no great labor; but it deepened and widened toward the south into a vast triangular gulch. Looking downward, they could see that it opened below, only a mile or so away, into a canyon-valley, extending east and west along the base of the range; and its steeply sloping walls were surmounted on the farther side, at least, by picturesque cliffs of rock. Standing higher than the tops of these cliffs, our friends could see that they were the exposed front of a table-land, or *mesa*, as the Spanish New-Mexicans call it, which extended southward apparently to the horizon, fairly level with the terrace upon which the party now stood.

"It's like a great castle with a moat in front of it," exclaimed Annie, who loved the romantic way of looking at things.

"Off south there," said Andy, pointing across the yellowish cedar-dotted mesa, "lies the canyon of the big Rio San Juan, and all these gulches

and stream-beds carry the water from the mountains down through narrow gorges or canyons to help fill it."

They could no longer see any signs of a road or trail, but felt sure it must lead down the western brink of the great gulch whose head they had just passed, for there was really nowhere else to drive. The ravine dropped away upon their left hand more and more steeply, while the rocks of the mountain side at their right became increasingly precipitous, leaving them a terrace-like path, which grew narrower and narrower. When at last the headland had been rounded, a second was seen to bar the way a short distance ahead, but to reach it required a long inward détour around the gap left in the roadway by a huge, and evidently recent, landslide. This was very discouraging, for it was now nearly five o'clock, the storm might burst upon them any moment, and all were very tired. Even Bimber had long ago begged to be taken up into the wagon, where Annie was sitting beside Zeph, whose jaws were set in a grim way, very different from the usually sunny grin that lighted up his rugged features.

But here was no place to encamp. There was no wood, no water, no grass, no shelter against the wrath of wind or rain. It would be more

than uncomfortable — it would be positively perilous to try it. It was useless to turn back. Nothing much better was to be found for five miles on the back trail. Andy galloped ahead a ways, and then beckoned to them to come on.

“There are some trees over there,” he called out as the wagon came up, at the same time pointing southwestward; “and it looks as if we could reach them, so let’s make a rush and try to get there before the rain comes — I’ve felt a few drops already.”

They pressed the weary animals forward as fast as they could go over the rough ground until at last they rounded the head of the gulch and turned their faces outward from the rocky hillside, over a surface that was more open and smooth, toward the trees which now seemed not more than half a mile away.

This move soon brought them out again into view of the tops of the mountains, whose crest had been hidden for a time, and they saw that the blue-black clouds now enveloped the whole range, and were momentarily torn and shot through by lightning bolts; but they went but a few rods when they were again halted, for here, just where they wished to advance, was the V-shaped head of a new arroyo, which opened outward and downward into a vast mountain gulch on the farther

side. A small ridge of crumbling soil and loose stones, scarcely a dozen yards in width, alone separated it from the gulch they had come around, and which, as they could now see, emptied far below on the left into the head, or, in fact, really *was* the bent head, of the great "moat" they had seen half an hour before. So deeply had this new westerly cut on their right worn back, that not only the road, but all place for one in advance, had been eaten away by the rushing waters of some former cloud-burst. It was plain that the next attack would very likely wash away a part of the separating ridge on which they stood, and which at present formed a high narrow causeway straight toward the trees.

"You can see how this has come about," said Andy, pointing to the mountain side in which a great trough led directly down to this point. "A snowslide has cleaned that out within a few years, and made a regular channel for storm-waters. There's a little brook, you see, tumbling down it now; and it is plain that whenever a big rush comes down, the flood splits on this ridge and runs down both gulches, at the same time wearing it away on both slopes."

"Well, that's O.K., I guess; but the conundrum is, What are we fellows going to do? We're in a tight fix!"

"There's only one thing to do, Zeph. Go along this ridge to the trees over there and camp; and to-morrow morning we'll hurry back and stop father as quick as we can. It's lucky we explored this road in advance of the big outfit. But we must go right away, and make time, too."

"I've got to water the critters first, anyhow," Zeph declared. "They're crazy with thirst, and I'll bet there's no drink for them among those scraggy cedars."

The two boys hastily brought pails of water from the brook to the mules, while the girls led the horses to a pool. Then Cora, after a glance at the sky, unsaddled Chestnut and threw the saddle into the wagon, after which she tied the pony's halter to the tail-board and got in with Annie, just as Zeph started his team.

"D'ye hear *that?*" he exclaimed, as a terrific crash of thunder almost stunned their ears, and a stream of stones went rattling down the gulches. "Gosh! It'll be boulders flyin' next. G'lang, mules! We must get out o' this, or we'll go a-rollin', too. There's no tellin' when this loose stuff under the wheels'll slide out. It's more like brown sugar than earth. Get up!"

But there was no need of yelling and whipping at the mules. They seemed to know the condition of things, and were more frightened than

their driver. Their leap forward broke Chestnut's halter, but he followed hard and fast, and, just as Andy dashed ahead with Jim on the run, down came a curtain of darkness, a roar of wind, and a volley of hail. That was enough. It was hard pulling, but anything, the mules thought, was better than the beating hail. They took the bits in their teeth and raced after Andy and his galloping horse. Zeph knew they were running away, and braced his feet to try to keep them straight — though he could see little himself in the darkness and the murk of rain.

Carter was carried by, clinging to his pommel for dear life, while his horse rushed headlong for the woods. The ambulance swayed and bounced, and it was almost a miracle it didn't turn over and roll to the bottom on one side or the other of the slender track. The girls were tumbled about, but succeeded after a while in dropping and fastening the rear curtain, which kept out some of the storm that seemed to force them along, and threatened to drown them like the overwhelming of a ship by a following sea. The full fury of a Rocky Mountain cloud-burst had struck the party. It was awful! and they were destined to see and suffer by such effects of it as they had never dreamed of. Fortunately, the distance was not great, or the story must needs stop



“ A curtain of darkness, a roar of wind, and a volley of hail.”



right here, when, in fact, it is just beginning to be interesting.

Andy and Carter, fast outrunning the ambulance, brought their horses to a stand amid a dense group of piñon pines and cedars, and, hastily knotting their bridles to trees, fought their way back to the aid of the others, sick with fear of what they might see.

They met the team a hundred yards back, in the very narrowest and weakest part of the ridge, where a crumbling slope fell away on each side almost from the wheels to unknown depths—it was too dark to see how or where. The soil was so loose it crushed and slid away under hoofs and tires, and threatened to carry the wagon with it. The rain seemed fairly to dig it up as well as to wash it away. The mules, out of breath and terrified by the place, had stopped and were plunging about in frantic excitement. Seizing the bridles of the leaders, the boys pulled and drove with the energy of a struggle against death, and at last forced the team beyond this dangerous hollow to firmer ground, where the animals recovered confidence somewhat, and so at last dragged their burden into the safety of the trees.

Hastily unharnessing the mules, and unsaddling the horses, the lads turned them loose to seek what shelter they could; and themselves, drenched as

though they had been swimming in the torrents whose roar came up to their ears from the gulches, crept inside the ambulance and dropped breathless upon the cargo.

Now they could rig up the front curtain and lace the others securely and keep dry; and this done, Bimber, who to his voluble indignation had been pitched into the wagon before the fracas, crept timidly into Cora's lap, and all felt snug except poor Nig, who was cowering under the wagon, whimpering with cold and fright.



CHAPTER X

RETURNS TO MR. MANNING AND HIS ANXIETIES

STORMS so terrific as this had been are, fortunately, never widespread. Back at Mr. Manning's camp its approach had been carefully noted, and, fearful of heavy rain, Mr. Manning sent John to collect the cattle and tie them near the wagon, while he and Hannah prepared the camp.

It was well these precautions were taken, for, though by no means equal to the small tornado that struck the boys on the lofty ridge, a very heavy wind came, and for a short time the ground was white with water. Mrs. Manning's tent was sound, however, and her husband and Hannah sat

beside her, while John took refuge inside the big wagon.

But the good mother had little thought for herself—all her anxiety was for her sons and daughters up on the mountain.

“Oh, *do* you think they are safe?” was her question over and over.

“Why, of course they are,” Mr. Manning would reply, while Hannah would say: “Now don’ you worry, honey. Nuffin’ won’t happen to do no harm while young Marse Andy’s ’long. Dat boy’ll carry ’em froo anything,— not to say nuffin’ ’bout dat limb o’ Satan Zeph McAllistah. I ain’ feared for dose chillen at all.”

“Oh, they’ll camp somewhere,” Mr. Manning would add. “Then they’ll crawl into the wagon and wait till it blows over. My only anxiety is whether they can keep the stock from straying, and so not lose time in the morning.”

“Then we can catch up with them all the sooner,” the fond mother exclaimed, finding what advantage she could in the calamity and so quieting her fears.

The wind fell about sundown and the rain gradually subsided. Day broke in a clear sky, and the sun rose, hot and splendid, as if no such disturbances had ever existed as clouds and storm. Encouraged by the brightness, and eager

in the thought of soon rejoining her children, Mrs. Manning declared herself strong again, and an hour after sunrise the party were once again on the march.

For a while they had no difficulty in following the old trail, aided by the track of the ambulance. But by and by, as they advanced higher and higher, the road became obscure and arduous. In some places a torrent had rushed down, leaving a layer of gravel, sand, and broken branches along the path; or had swept away from the surface all marks of the wheels; or had ploughed gullies crosswise. Now and then these gullies were troublesome to cross, and before long John, who was riding in advance, came back to say that there was a new one ahead which he feared would be impassable.

“Can't we repair the break?” Mr. Manning asked cheerfully.

“I reckon so. We can try, anyhow.”

This washout was forty or fifty yards wide and ten or fifteen feet deep, but half an hour's labor with pickaxe and shovel sufficed to cut a sloping descent in its bank. Then the wagon was driven down it, and on over the rough, stony bottom of the trench and hauled up on the other side through another sloping excavation.

Thus laboring slowly along the trail the sturdy

oxen brought them about 4 P.M. to the place where the young people had made their first night's camp. The first thing that struck their eyes, almost, was Andy's letter pegged to the log by the fireplace. They already knew that the boys intended to go ahead a piece as explorers, because the Mexican trapper had faithfully delivered his message, "*con mucho gusto*," as he gallantly replied to Mrs. Manning's thanks; but this gave them news of the successful bighorn hunt, and both were proud of Andy's first capture. It also told them of the good night's rest, and the high spirits in which all had started forward.

They, too, passed a pleasant night. John reported that the oxen fed well, and they began their march next morning both refreshed and encouraged. This feeling increased as the day wore on and no one came back to meet them, as Andy had promised, for Mr. Manning considered it a sign that the road was good, and there was no need to send back any guide. It was steadily but gradually up hill, and oxen walk slowly, so that what the mules had easily done in four hours took them eight; and the afternoon was well advanced, and they had begun to keep an eye out for the ambulance, expecting to see it, or a tent, each time they surmounted one of the many low

ridges, when they suddenly came to the brink of the first of the big washouts which the scouting party had encountered. And there in the middle of the trail was Cora's note in the split stick, which the girl had planted so firmly that not even the violence of the great storm had been able to throw it down.

But it was evident that the rush of water had deepened and broadened the gulch considerably; and when Mr. Manning, as directed, rode up to where the boys had easily crossed its source, he saw at a glance that the storm had so changed it that instead of an hour's work, a week's labor would hardly suffice to make the place passable for the schooner.

Later his wife and John walked up with him, and both saw what a barrier the gulch presented. Then Mr. Manning scrambled down afoot, scaled (by no means easily) the steep and crumbling farther bank, and shaving a quaking asp wrote with his pencil upon the hard white wood a message to Andy, saying that he would go back a couple of miles to a good camp-ground he had passed, and wait for word from them.

"It will be much easier to get the light ambulance back across that ditch, than this great wagon," he explained as he returned.

So the oxen were turned around, and before

sunset a pleasant camp was made beside the little stream he had had in mind. Then Mr. Manning started out with his rifle, and before he had been gone fifteen minutes they heard a shot and soon saw him coming gayly in with a deer on his shoulder—greatly to Hannah's delight.

To their anxious disappointment no word was received next day from the children; and on the second morning Mr. Manning announced that he was going to see what had become of them, fearing that the storm had upset the wagon, or caused some other accident.

He rode to the gulch-crossing, John walking by his side to bring back the horse, and then went on afoot, carrying his rifle, army field-glasses, and a long slender rope.

With more or less difficulty he traced their course, scrambling in and out of the enlarged gulches where the ambulance had crossed, and by two o'clock reached the last of the great washouts that had checked their progress. Here a torrent was still leaping down the mountain trough, which he crossed with danger and difficulty. The wheel-tracks led along its farther side, next the rocks, and he followed them readily to the extremity of the point of rocks, where they sharply ended at the brink of a deep gulf, along the bottom of which, a hundred feet below, and next to the per-

pendicular wall of rocks which formed its farther side, rushed a heavy stream of water, thick with mud and gravel and boughs of trees. It was evident that this was the outlet of many streams, all booming after the recent rainfall. Just below him some rocks made a dam, where a great quantity of débris had caught, and he searched it with his glasses for the remains of the ambulance, but nothing of the kind appeared. He continued the fearful search as far up and down the canyon as his powerful binoculars would reach, but had no reward. So he took courage and came to the conclusion that the ambulance had gone on around the point of rocks; but he could not follow. Its base was now far down in the pit, and its walls were unclimbable. The mystery could not be solved to-day, at any rate, and after firing his rifle three times and getting no response, he reluctantly tramped homeward, where he arrived after nightfall, very weary and with a sad tale for the waiting mother.

Mr. Manning stoutly maintained his opinion that the youngsters were all right, and now beyond the mountain spur, where they had been cut off by the landslides and washouts which after they had passed had taken away the earth, probably a narrow terrace upon which they had driven. He believed that if an object like the

ambulance had fallen into the gulch, some trace of it, at least, would appear among the débris at the dam.

“We can’t leave you women here alone; and one man could do no good by going to search again. It is likely much easier for one of them to cross over the spur of the mountain and come to us.”

So they waited. But no one came, and all that it seemed possible to do was to go back to the settlements on the Rio Grande and send out a party of men to search.

This meant ten days’ marching before Fernando de Taos was reached, which was the first town where they could get intelligent aid. But here no one could be found to go. The only feasible route was by way of the Rio San Juan valley, and of that the settlers were afraid, because that was Navajo country. Those Indians were known to be on the war-path against the Mokis and other tribes south and west of them, and the Rio Grande Indians and their Mexican friends knew that the Navajos would jump on them as quick as any one else if they got the chance.

It was necessary, therefore, to journey back to Santa Fé; but here all the troops and most of the able-bodied men of the place were found to be off on an expedition protecting emigrants and settlers

from raiding Comanches and Apaches down the river, and nothing could be done till they returned.

“When will that be?” impatiently cried the distracted father.

“*Quien sabe?*” was the only answer.



CHAPTER XI

MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY

THE cold and hunger and distress in which the boys and girls passed that night in the ambulance need not be described. If you can't imagine it, description would be of no use, and the details wouldn't interest you. They got out dry coats and waistcoats, pulled off their wet boots, wrapped themselves in blankets, and managed to get broken hours of sleep, but earliest daylight saw them all awake and creeping out.

The storm had quite ended. The air was cool, the sky clear, and the sun rose round and red over the level-topped ridges until it gilded the few freshly snowy summits thrust above the mists

that still enveloped all the lower part of the range.

Its rays revealed to our adventurers that they were in the edge of a wood of cedars, pines, and bushes, which was rather open and seemed to extend indefinitely southward; while northward, and only a short distance away, rose the rocky foot-hills, where the storm had overtaken them yesterday.

Nothing was to be seen of any of the animals; and while Carter began to look about for dry wood, his teeth chattering the while, and to split kindling out of the middle of a cedar log in order to start a fire, Andy and Zeph marched away in search of the horses and mules. The girls hastened to bring breakfast things from the wagon, and in half an hour or so had hot coffee steaming on the embers and a fair meal spread upon a box; and just at the right moment the two absentees returned.

“Didn’t you find the stock?”

“Not a hoof of ’em!”

“Oh, is Chestnut lost?” cried the girls, with one voice, springing up as if they meant to run after him then and there, and forgetting for the moment all the other and really more important animals.

“No such luck,” growled Carter, and got a

rattling good whack on the ear from his exasperated sister.

The boy leaped to his feet with blazing eyes, and Cora was ready, but Zeph grabbed his collar and after a struggle got him down and sat on him.

"Now listen, you pesky wildcat. When you try to strike a girl, even if she is your sister, an' I'm round, you may expect to hear from me every time."

"She hit me first!" yelled the boy, his mouth so full of pine-needles and Bimber making such a row the words could hardly be heard.

"Don't care. She had a right to, you was that aggravatin'. Anyhow, she says she's sorry. Now get up and eat your breakfast!"

And Zeph leaped off.

Carter picked himself up, and glanced at Andy, as if he expected his "big brother" would take his part. But Andy was paying no attention — didn't seem to know anything had happened. Annie looked as if she wanted to cry, and Cora as if she wanted to laugh.

"I guess Chestnut is with the rest of the stock, and probably they're not far off," said Andy. "We found a ridge back here in the woods a ways, and from the top of it we could see a good bit of open land off to the southward. I presume the animals are out there quietly eating their fill of

better grass than they have tasted for some time. Zeph and I concluded we'd get some breakfast before we went and spoiled theirs."

"Most particular," added Zeph, "seein' we ain't had none since yesterday, and no supper since the day before that."

The meal was eaten hastily, and with only one drawback to comfort. This was the absence of good drinking water, for there was no spring or stream near them, so that nothing better could be had than the half-muddy rainwater which had been caught in some hollows of the rocks—and little enough of that.

"Let's walk back and see where we came last night, before you go after the horses," Annie suggested. "It won't take long, and I for one am curious."

So all set out along the wagon's track, which they found had not been altogether washed out by the deluge. Presently Zeph stopped and pointed at an imprint in the soft ground.

"Look there. Ain't that a deer track?"

"It must be," Andy agreed as he stooped down and examined the two little prints of the split hoofs, side by side. "And see, there's another."

"And here's some more," cried one of the girls who had joined the three.

It was plain that a band of deer had raced past

them in the night, evidently running very fast, as if fleeing away from the mountains, and apparently about at the time they themselves had passed there, for the tracks were no fresher than those of the horses and mules — and hardly farther apart. It was evident both were a-jumping.

“Pity we didn’t get a shot at ’em,” Zeph exclaimed.

“Fine shooting you’d ’a’ done in that gale,” retorted Cora, who never lost an opportunity to spar with the boy and wasn’t softened any by his recent championship.

“From the way they scud along here amongst us it looks as though I could have caught one by its horns — or even by its tail.”

“Maybe they were as badly scared as the rest of us,” said Annie.

Meanwhile all walked rapidly on, following the wheel-tracks, which presently led them out of the trees and loose soil upon a stony surface. All this was quite new to them, for in the darkness and tempest and rush they had seen nothing, though the girls remembered bouncing over these stones. Hardly a hundred yards of this were passed when everybody was suddenly halted by a most amazing sight. Without an instant’s warning they had nearly stepped off the brink of a cliff right across their path, and found themselves

staring down into a chasm, in the bottom of which whirlpools of muddy water were racing away to the westward. They had crossed no bridge, nor had they forded any river in their flight—certainly they could not have crossed this frightful hole, and yet their wheel-tracks were plainly to be seen leading straight to the very edge of the precipice, and apparently over it! And beyond the chasm they recognized the promontory of rocks they had skirted, and the place where they had watered the mules—but both seemed changed. The rocks were far higher, and the brook had become a great cataract!

No one was needed to explain what had happened, after their wits had recovered from the first surprise.

This chasm had been made by rushing waters. A tremendous flood had swept down the trough in the mountain, had struck the soft ridge, sluiced it out on both sides, and carried away all the loose and crumbling causeway along which they had been dragged so perilously in the darkness by their runaway team. In its place there was now a ravine, whose cliff-like face dropped beneath their feet as straight and smooth as the side of a house; and every one could see that the cut was steadily growing wider and deeper under

the teeth of the torrents of water still tumbling down the various gulches from a thousand gathering sources far up in the range.

“Why, how can we ever get back to the road?” cried Cora, — the first who spoke.

“We *can't* get back — at any rate across here,” said Andy. “No living man could go down this cliff without a rope-ladder a hundred feet long.”

“Where *shall* we go?” Cora continued anxiously, her eyes fixed upon the two ravines broadening and deepening right and left.

“I don't know, girlie,” was all her brother could answer, as his eyes followed her gaze along the brink of the cliffs and into the depths of the booming gulches.



CHAPTER XII

CONTAINS MUCH BAD LUCK

VERY quietly the little group turned their backs upon the chasm which the cloudburst had cut between them and the mountain, and returned to the ambulance and their little fireside. The sun still shone, a gentle wind rustled among the pine boughs, inquiring how they had passed the tempestuous night, and a rock-wren, which had strayed up upon this height, was pouring out his brilliant melody, as happy as only a bird can be. But these bright sights and sounds were little noticed, for a feeling of dread and impending trouble weighed down the hearts and faces of all our friends and kept them silent. Each was

busied with his or her own thoughts, but all, we may be sure, ran to the same sad tune: how were they to get back to the road and join father and mother?

“Certainly the first thing to do,” said Andy, with decision, voicing the common thought, “is to find the stock. Come on, you fellows. Take good care of things, girls.”

“Oh, don’t leave us here all alone!” cried both sisters in chorus, their faces full of alarm.

“Why, what are you afraid of?”

“It’s so lonesome!” was all they could say, at first, but in the next breath found more reasons — “wildcats, *bears*, INDIANS,” ran the list in a scale of growing terrors.

“Nonsense! Nothing will harm you. We won’t be gone long, anyhow. Come on, boys.”

“Oh, please let us go too!” the girls persisted plaintively.

“Now what foolishness!” exclaimed Andy, impatiently; and Zeph added, “Who’s goin’ to take care of the wagon if you don’t stay here?”

“What’s the use of *any one* guarding the wagon if no harm is coming?—and if there is, *I* don’t want to face it all alone,” argued Annie, supported by Cora’s “Nor I!”

But the boys were obdurate and marched off, leaving the girls to drop down on a log and weep,

whereupon Bimber set up a howl so sharp and sudden that the sisters, thinking for an instant it was a wolf, rushed into each other's arms and cracked their heads together until they howled louder than Bimber, and with better reason. Clinging close together, they rubbed their heads and looked furtively over their shoulders, half expecting to see something terrible at their elbows. Bimber "sat up" inquiringly, asking in the clearest way he knew what they proposed to do next and where his part came in, but got no attention. He did not know what to do. Nig had been called away and gone off with the boys, and his mistress seemed to have gone daft. The little dog was naturally puzzled, and judged himself thrown back upon his own resources. The idea suddenly struck him that he was being left out of some fun which that old black Nig was enjoying, and he whirled round, hoisted his ears, and sprang away, only to be hauled back by his stump of a tail and told of his meanness in deserting his mistress in her dire distress in a sharper voice than he had heard for some time. This hurt his feelings. It was, he felt, unjust. It seemed to him she had deserted him first, and he had followed a very natural and proper impulse in starting after his other friends. But he was a discerning and a forgiving doggie; and feeling

that something had happened beyond his comprehension, he wagged his aching tail resignedly, and said he'd stay and see the thing through. What a noble devotion this little dog really had Cora was to find out later.

The rock-wren still spluttered and sang on the service-berry bush, and the breeze rustled the grasses and presently dried the tears.

"How still it is!" whispered Annie, paying no attention to the breeze or rattling music of the wren, who was doing his level best to cheer up these sad young ladies.

"Wasn't it *dreadful* of them to leave us? Let's get into the ambulance."

"Oh, no! no!" Annie cried, glancing swiftly behind her as if she had heard the swish of a ghost's robe. "We couldn't *see* anything there!"

One would naturally think that fact a high advantage, judging by their fearsome eyes, and the way they started at every sound; but one can never be sure of anything in the case of two girls — or even one!

But after all these maids were too healthy to keep up this sort of thing, and it was not long before they came back to common sense and made up their minds that they would follow after their brothers — thinking the risk of get-

ting lost, or anything else, better than remaining quietly at the wagon.

So hand in hand they ran through the sweet-smelling woods, and Bimber, satisfied that their lost wits had been recovered, bounded ahead, looking back every few steps to make sure they were following, and searching the ground with his keen black nose for traces of the party ahead. He meant to overtake them if possible before Nig had monopolized all the sport. The ground was carpeted with needles and almost dry, in spite of the rain; and before long they came to the foot of a rocky bank which, like a vast ruined wall, ran across the woods in front of them. It was not very high and they began at once to climb it, remembering Andy's saying at breakfast that from the top of this ridge one could overlook a wide plain. They took a step forward, and halted, frozen in their tracks, clutching one another's hands till their finger nails almost cut the soft flesh. A hoarse, gurgling, squeaking sound, such as they had never heard in their lives, seemed to come out of the thicket right beside them. Neither could move a step. They dared not turn their heads. "Why didn't that miserable dog do something to defend them?" was the thought in each mind. Suddenly the bush broke into a harsh scream, like some horrible old maniac laughing

at their terror and meaning the next instant to spring at their throats; and at this dreadful menace they spun round and fled like the wind, yet not so quickly that they did not catch sight of a large black-and-white bird sweeping away through the pines with a roguish whistle, as if in glee over the consternation it had caused.

"Only a magpie!" Annie panted, and as their eyes met both laughed, but rather nervously. "What a pair of ninnies to be upset by a bird! Even Bim is laughing at us — look at the rascal, both ears up in impertinent astonishment!"

"I don't *care!*" Cora cried stoutly, and her sister understood her.

So they turned back and valiantly retraced their steps, but they still clasped hands very tightly and kept their eyes open very wide.

"See *there!*" Annie had stopped short and was pointing at a small clump of grass growing in an open space among the trees.

"Don't you see that thing moving?"

Cora did look and did see something move — something alive and furry. Both stared, standing stock-still, because too frightened to run, gazing at a round head with two great eyes distinctly visible among the tops of the tall grass.

"Wh-h-h-h-h!" began one, trying to say something in a whisper through her chattering teeth,

when the head bobbed above the tussock and two long ears sprang upright.

“Aouw!” squealed the girls, and jumped as if moved by one and the same spring; and once more the dog had the laugh on them and got all the fun there was, for like a shot he was off after a — jack-rabbit.

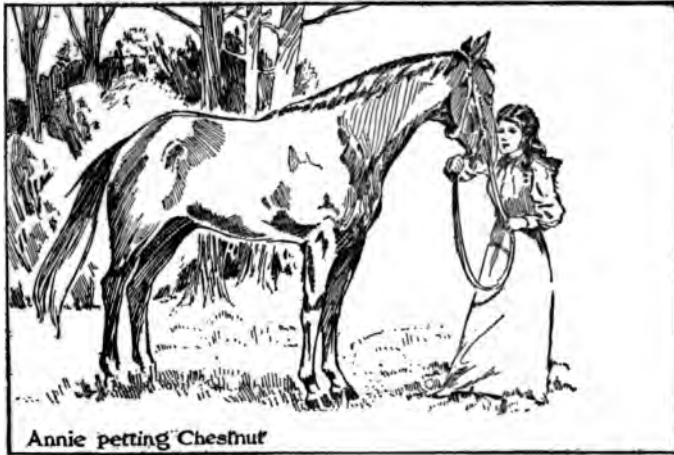
By the time he had given up the chase and come joyously back the sisters had talked it over, and steeled their hearts and stiffened their knees (or thought they had) against any more foolish fright. There really was some excuse for them, and the pluck with which they returned to the charge and again and again set their faces forward must be placed to their credit. They were pretty badly scared, but not yet demoralized. So again they began slowly clambering up the ridge, while Bimber dodged about their feet in the bushes intent upon his own affairs.

Panting with terror and their exertions together, they gained the top, and Cora, pushing aside a fringe of bushes, was just about stepping out on the summit of the ridge, when Bimber, bristling like a porcupine, broke into a hurricane of barking, and, with a blood-curdling scream, Cora sprang back, knocking over Annie, and jumped, rolled, and slid down the slope, her sister shrieking at her heels, and they never stopped till both,

and the bewildered dog with them, were hidden under a pile of blankets behind the ambulance curtains.

What had put these brave maidens to rout so ignominiously *this* time?

An Indian — a real, live, painted Indian, crouching in the brush, ready to spring, as they believed, upon the unsuspecting victim who had parted the twigs just before his savage face.



CHAPTER XIII

FURNISHES A CHOICE ASSORTMENT OF DIFFICULTIES

HUDDLING there in the hot ambulance, in constant expectation of seeing a scalping-knife flashing round their heads, minutes passed like hours, so that really it may not have been so long as it seemed before the stifling warmth and continued quiet and their curiosity, all together, forced the girls to peep cautiously out from the depths of their bedding.

“Besides,” whispered Annie, “if he had followed us, Bimber would be growling, instead of going to sleep and snoring like an ungrateful pig.”

So they poked their heads out timidly and looked abroad. No one was perched on the

driver's seat, at least, and encouraged by the absence of all noises save the unconcerned carolling of that same cheerful rock-wren, they crept first to a little hole in the curtain, whence they could reconnoitre, then to the front end, and finally, after talking it over, they descended to the ground.

"Well, I'm sure we have had good reason to be scared, haven't we, Cote?" Annie argued in self-defence. "You know how papa is always cautioning us against Indians; and think of all the horrible stories about their torturing white people and taking girls away into captivity."

"I'm going to try *not* to think of it," Cora answered bravely. "I mean to load Andy's shotgun, and if any Indians come, I'll shoot — *one*, anyhow — see if I don't!"

And when this had been done (the percussion-cap was forgotten, but let us not mention it) and the gun had been placed close beside them, they mustered their reserves of pluck, and went at clearing away the breakfast dishes, and afterward at making their simple preparations for another meal, still very watchful, but with more calmness than one would think possible who knew of their nervous panic an hour before. In fact, a real danger is far more easily faced than some imaginary one; and the feeling that they were nearly

powerless, anyhow, gave them a kind of resignation to fate, which took the place of coolness. But as the morning passed and nothing disturbed its serenity, the natural buoyancy of youth asserted itself, they forgot to talk in whispers, and Annie even caught herself singing.

Nevertheless the place was lonesome, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that, after the sun had well started on his way down the afternoon sky, a ringing whoop was heard, and Andy came galloping into camp on the bare back of his own horse, with the boy up behind, and Zeph sticking like a burr on Chestnut.

"Oh, how glad we are you have come back!" cried both the girls, their half-forgotten fears suddenly reviving; and tears of excitement and relief sprang to their eyes as they felt themselves once more under protection.

The boys listened to all their story (minus the unimportant little incidents of the magpie and jack-rabbit!), were immensely interested, and asked all sorts of questions; but Annie had never had any glimpse at all of "that horrid savage," and Cora hadn't stopped to examine his appearance in the least, so that neither could add much to the simple fact that he had been seen.

"It's a pity you were so scared, my dear," said Andy, as he knotted a horsehair lariat around the

neck of his horse and slipped the bridle off, "but I don't think the Indian meant any harm, or he would have followed you; and I'm not sure but it is a good thing you saw him, for it may help us out of this, and I'm 'fraid we'll need it."

"Why—can't we go away?" asked the girls, with alarm.

"Not till we find some new road."

"And a pretty long one at that," Zeph added.

"Oh, do tell us what you have seen!"

"Well, we went on over that ridge you tried to climb—which is really a rocky bank, for its top is the level plain—and finally found some mule-tracks turning to the left. We followed 'em along for half a mile, I should say, and then came out upon the edge of a cliff like that we saw this morning, only five times higher. We could look 'way off across the canyon to the mountains and over toward father's camp, so that we knew it was the same big gulch along the other side of which we travelled yesterday. The cliffs stretched southward for a dozen miles or more, and it'll take a long march to get beyond them."

"Couldn't you see anything of the schooner?"

"Not a sign of it!"

"I don't believe father could follow our trail anyhow," Carter interrupted, "'cause there were big landslides last night."

"New ones, too," Zeph added seriously, "that must 'a' washed out the road in a dozen places."

Annie was patting Chestnut's neck, whispering how glad she was to get him back, and how naughty he had been to run away. Suddenly she lifted her head:—

"But where are the *mules*?"

"No telling. We found their trail, though. All the animals had wandered along down the brink of the cliff, as if looking for a place to get down, for a mile or so, and then their tracks turned sharp to the west, and on the run, as if something had scared them. We followed as fast as we could, and by and by saw them a long ways off."

"You *bet* it was a long ways," murmured Carter, who was lying on the ground, almost tired out.

"After a lot of trouble we managed to get a grip on these two, but Carter's old mare and the mules kept out of reach. We'll start out on horseback at daylight to-morrow."

"I allow they're half mad with thirst," Zeph explained. "You ought to have seen these critters drink when we came to some little mudholes on the way back."

"Yes, I guess that's what made 'em so wild. There doesn't seem to be any water anywhere."

"Didn't you chase the others?" Cora asked.

"Of course, but they had got so far ahead while we were getting hold of the horses, and the ground was so hard, that pretty soon we lost track of them."

"What did you do then?"

"Scattered — climbed every little hill we came to, hunting for their trail, but had no luck at all. Then Zeph proposed that we explore westward, and so we rode off in that direction a mile or so, and that brought us out upon another cliff, just like those east of us, with another great canyon under it — the same one, I suppose, that we saw the head of yesterday."

"Then if papa tries to come to us around that way it will take him a long time, won't it?" asked Annie, anxiously.

"Yes, Puss, I'm afraid it will. As soon as we can catch those mules we must travel southward to meet him, for it is certain he can't reach us from any other direction."

"But how are we going to drag the ambulance up that rocky ridge?" said Zeph, presenting a new difficulty.

"I don't know — we'll have to look for a better place than any near here."

"And what shall we do for drinking water?" Cora asked, remembering how much trouble she

had had in filling a single pail from the rock-hollows.

“I don’t know that either, Cora,” her brother had to confess again. “We’re in a bad scrape, and we’ve got to find a way out of it, but just how I confess I don’t know.”



CHAPTER XIV

ENERGETICALLY FACES A NEW SITUATION

THE simple but hearty dinner had been eaten early, for the boys had had no luncheon; and afterward all hands went together to seek a practicable wagon road up the rocky bench. Moving first toward the right, they found the bench rougher and the woods thicker until at last they came out upon the cliff edge, where the girls could look down into the great valley on that (the western) side and understand how impossible it would be to descend these almost vertical piles of ledges.

Turning back, they walked eastward, climbing here and there to investigate any place that

seemed likely, and at last discovered a rather low, but very rough, spot in the hillside, where the mules might perhaps drag up the ambulance if several trees were cut down and a good many rocks were rolled out of the way or pitched into hollows to level the surface. They decided that there was where the trail would have to be made.

While the boys were talking, Cora wandered off a little ways, and soon they heard her shouting to them to come and see what she had found. It was something worth while—a large pool of clear water which had drained into a hollow of the rocks. There were twenty or thirty barrels of it, they judged, and this supply put them at ease on that score for a few days at least.

“Let’s move camp up here,” said Annie, “so as to be near it.”

“When we catch the mules,” her brother reminded her.

“Well, if somebody will go back with me to fetch a bucket, we can take some water back, anyhow.”

Zeph volunteered and the rest sat down and waited; and after the buckets had been brought and filled all returned to the ambulance, and building up a good fire of fragrant dead cedar logs, sat down to an evening which was far from gloomy in spite of their problems. And if Annie

did put her face down on her brother's knee, and shed a few tears, what harm was it—and who cared? After much talk, plans were laid for the morrow's search; but it was not long before all laid themselves down to make up for the loss of sleep and the fatigue they had endured during the previous two days.

Everybody was up and busy bright and early next morning. The sun came glimmering through the scraggy trees, and the grove was vocal with birds—loudest of all the same carelessly cheerful little rock-wren who had tried so hard yesterday to raise the spirits of the lonely girls.

Breakfast was despatched, and then all hands took fifteen minutes for a run back to the cliff-edge, where nothing was to be seen except evidence that the water was still cutting the chasm deeper—but a few feet more or less now was of little consequence. It was already twice as deep as the length of any rope they had. Sure that not a sign of any living thing on the opposite bank was visible, they turned away, feeling that now their escape depended wholly on themselves, and that no time must be lost in recovering their draft animals.

The horses, which had been securely tied during the night, were saddled, but not for riding.

There were two or three bags among their stores, and these were filled with cooking utensils and a selection of provisions calculated to last at least five days—though Andy felt sure they would not have to search as long as that. These were hung about the saddle of Andy's horse "Jim," and on top was placed a roll of bedding, the whole being lashed on as firmly as possible without the proper appliances for packing. But they meant to go slowly, and after they had climbed the rocky ridge at the edge of the woods, the way would be smooth so far as they knew, so that the packs would probably stay on.

In the same way Chestnut was loaded with rolls of bedding, the bridles of the missing mules, an axe, and a few other necessities; and then, buttoning tightly the curtains all around the ambulance, to keep out rain and inquisitive animals (especially the beautiful but overfamiliar chipmunks, which would be sure to raid their provisions if any chance were offered), the expedition was ready to go forth, save in one respect—the carriage of water.

This was the most important provision and presented the greatest difficulty; and it was mainly on account of it that Andy and Zeph had strongly objected to the girls going with them when they had discussed the matter the evening before.

They said, with much force, that the proper thing was for themselves to go off on horseback, and for Cora and Annie and Carter to keep the camp. The girls simply wouldn't hear of this arrangement—they confessed they were afraid; and besides they wanted to be a part of the searching party, and no arguments based merely on good sense affected them at all. So the boys had been compelled to give in and agree to the present arrangements, about the success of which they protested they were dubious.

As to the water question, they had searched their baggage for means of carrying a supply in some other way than in big open buckets. They knew they had with them a four-quart, tightly closed milk-can, which had been used sometimes in the early part of their travels, but now was filled with brown sugar. This was poured out into a box, and the can refilled with water; but four quarts was not much.

Looking farther, they found a quart bottle filled with vinegar.

"My, but won't Hannah say things when she misses this!" laughed Annie, when she discovered it. "Say, Cote, I'm not going to throw this vinegar away. I'm going to pour it into a little rock-hollow I know of, and we can get a good share of it when we come back,"—and she did.

By the help of three or four other bottles and tin pails, about five quarts more water were provided for. All these receptacles were filled when they reached the big pool, where the horses and themselves drank their fill before starting. The tight milk-can was hung on "Jim's" saddle, the bottles and pails were distributed among the travellers, and off they started, reaching the open plain about nine o'clock in the morning.

Here Andy took command. He made every one cut a poplar sapling, with a bunch of twigs and leaves left at the top, and carry it with them to use as a signal flag. Then he distributed his forces.

"Do you see that little knob sticking up off south there, almost as far as we can see?"

All eyes followed his pointing arm and took the knob well in mind.

"It was down by that Zeph and Carter saw the last tracks yesterday. Now, Cora and Nannie, you lead the horses straight down to that knob, which is a pile of rocks,—and look out for snakes when you get there,—and Zeph and Carter and I will spread out right and left and swing around to the rocks before long. We don't want to miss the stock, if they take it into their mule heads to turn back this way. If anybody sees the brutes, or finds new tracks,

let him wave his flag to let the rest of us know he wants help."

So they scattered, and three hours later the party were gathered at the knob, where the girls had been waiting some time. They found a little muddy water here and wisely gave it to the horses one at a time.

Zeph was the last to come in, and reported, as he flung himself down on the grass and wiped his brow, that he had swung well to the southwest and had there struck the trail of the mules, which had travelled southward, and apparently had not turned back. "That's the direction to hunt for 'em," he declared.

After an hour's rest, and a bite of food and swallow of drink, they started on. This time they spread out as widely as they could and keep in sight of one another. Zeph went in the middle, following the trail. On each side of him were the girls, — a quarter of a mile away, — and outside of them Andy and Carter. This made a line covering a mile or more in width of country, and occasionally a hilltop — though none was ever of much height — gave a still larger outlook.

So they tramped on. The walking was by no means good, — often stony, always rough with bunch-grass, sage-brush clumps, which one has to walk around, and masses of the low cactus called

prickly-pear or tuna. The day was hot, the yellow glare of the sun-bleached plain pained their eyes, and they were tormented by thirst, yet dared not drink their water until they had to, for there was no telling when more could be got.

There was little to interest them. A few sparrow-like birds flitted from bush to bush. Once a plover, with a cry like their home kildee, rose and whirled away in vast indignation, and they got a glimpse of a band of antelope. Of the mules, however, they saw nothing, and everybody was getting very tired, when about four o'clock Zeph was seen waving his bush flag violently. So the girls waved theirs until Andy and Carter saw the signal and came in and all gathered about the tracker, who had to report simply that the trail had disappeared.

"It began to frazzle out some ways back," Zeph explained. "You see the grass is pretty fair here, and the critters scattered out to feed; and the ground is so dry and hard that it don't show no marks when the animals are stepping slow and light."

Andy looked disheartened. Everybody was tired, and Annie had lain down and hidden her face on her arm as if she were almost exhausted.

"Like as not we can pick it up again, off

there," said Zeph, pointing ahead. "They seemed headed that way pretty straight."

"We'll have to make a big circle, and that only needs one or two of us. There's a bit of a knoll over there a little ways, where we can unsaddle and maybe camp. Think you can go that far, Nan?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that, but I'm afraid I can't travel much farther. I'm ashamed of myself, but I do get *so* tired in this heat."

"Oh, it's no matter. We're all pretty tired, I reckon."

The knoll proved to have a steep face of rocks on the other side, with an overhanging ledge, making a dry, snug shelter, large enough to protect the whole party should a rain-storm come.

"We'll camp here," exclaimed Andy, the moment he saw the place.

"And we won't be the first to do so," cried Cora, pointing at a little heap of charcoal and ashes.

Indeed, it was plain that it had often served this purpose, for the rocks were blackened with smoke, and hundreds of pieces of broken pottery, in various colors, such as they had seen in the Indian villages above Sante Fé, were strewed in the dust.

“Probably a regular camping place for Injun hunting-parties,” was Zeph’s opinion.

They unpacked the horses, and made a bed of blankets for Annie the first thing. She didn’t want to lie down, but “Doctor” Andy insisted — told her he didn’t want an invalid on his hands, and it was her business to rest and recover her strength. Then he and Zeph mounted the horses and rode away, in opposite directions, first setting up their “flags” on the summit of the knoll to aid them in recognizing it among the hundred or so other hillocks in sight, — all pretty much alike.

About sunset both boys returned, having met two or three miles away, and reported that they had got on the track of the missing animals again.

“Zeph found the trail apparently of the whole bunch, and they were heading right south on the run,” Andy told them.

This was better than no news, but it meant another day’s time and labor in chasing the run-aways; and old plainsmen would have told them that it might be weeks rather than days before they were caught if the cunning creatures took it into their heads to go all the way back to the Manning camp. But, fortunately for their peace of mind, there were no old plainsmen there to croak in such a disturbing way.

However, that would be to-morrow, and meanwhile they must have something to eat. Carter had pulled up and broken off two or three armfuls of sage-brush, which makes a hot, crackling flame, very good for a cooking fire, and soon the coffee-pot was filled with a proper quantity of their precious store of water, and Cora was just going to set it on the coals, when Andy stopped her, picked up his rifle, and fired; then rushed out and brought in the body of a big jack-rabbit.

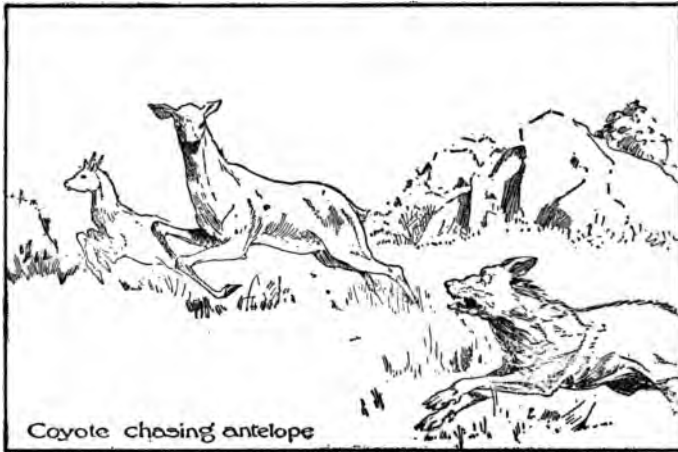
“Hooray for a stew!” he called.

“Gracious!” exclaimed Cora. “You going to eat *that!*”

“Of course. Why not?”

It wasn't so bad as she expected, nor so good as he had hoped,—rather tough, and with a flavor of resin,—but they ate it, and Annie said:—

“There's one thing to remember — it 'saves our bacon!’”



Coyote chasing antelope

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THE PILGRIMS COME TO A HAPPY VALLEY

As early as possible next morning the tramp was renewed, although the travellers were chilly, footsore, and anxious. They had slept soundly; but just before going to bed, while lounging round the sage-brush fire, which Bimber disapproved of because it had a way of snapping, the little dog suddenly sprang up and rushed off into the darkness, barking furiously; and as soon as Nig heard the tone of his voice, she too was after him, with every hair on end. By and by they came back, and Andy concluded that a stray coyote had aroused their wrath. The incident

kept no one awake five minutes, for they were utterly weary.

The morning was sparkling with light and sunshine, and the mountains wore their most majestic mien. Never had the wanderers had so fine a view of them — or cared so little about it. The girls, and Annie in particular, wished sometimes that they had remained at the ambulance and faced the terrors of loneliness, but neither one said so — and O for a drink of water!

They went straight to where Zeph had found the trail, and followed it, for it continued plain, and apparently all the mules and Carter's old horse too — whose larger footprints could often be seen — were marching straight along.

"I think they are making for water, and won't stop till they find it," said Zeph; and the others thought this likely.

Every time they mounted one of the low ridges, which succeeded one another like the "dead swells" of a sea after a gale, they hoped to see the runaway band, but nothing rewarded their eyes, save now and then an antelope or two. Sometimes these animals were very tame, standing with their heads up and pretty lyre-shaped horns sharp and black against the sky, until the walking-party had come within fifty yards or so, when they would spin around and make off. But

somehow this never happened when either Andy or Zeph (who carried the two rifles) was within shooting distance.

By noon Annie became very tired indeed, and confessed to Andy, who happened to be near them, that she had a dreadful headache; whereupon he unstrapped the blankets from Chestnut's back, and lifted her into the saddle, adding some of the burden to Jim's load and taking one roll on his own shoulders.

All at once, as they walked on, Cora seized the bridle, stopping the three with a low *Sst*, and pointed ahead. A doe antelope was coming backward over a low hillock a little way off at the left, pursued by a coyote; and behind her, sticking close to her heels, was a young fawn — a nimble, elegant little miniature of the mother, whose soft eyes were now full of wild alarm. Andy reached down and picked up Bimber, and then all three watched the game.

The fawn was the tender prey the wolf was pursuing, and well did both the mother and her little one understand the danger. Let the coyote make never so quick and clever a dash, there was the active antelope ready to meet him. Her head was down level with his own snarling countenance, although she had no sword-like horns to use in defence, as had her absent mate; but when-

ever the wolf came near enough to give her an opportunity, she would spring into the air and try to strike him with her sharp little hoofs. He was afraid of these hoofs, understanding perfectly what it would mean to be struck by them, and would dodge each blow energetically; and all the time, no matter how skilfully the coyote manœuvred to separate it from its dam, the fawn kept close at her heels, knowing that there alone was it safe.

Whether the wolf would finally have given up the chase and gone away nobody knows—it is doubtful whether he would not have tired out the poor little mother and captured the fawn before night; but while the girls were watching the contest, keen with interest and sympathy, a rifle-crack rang out at their elbows, the coyote sprang into the air and fell back dead, while the doe and fawn bounded away, fleeing like gray shadows down the yellow hillside.

For some time they had been approaching a line of low hills, which presently showed itself as a long ridge or wall of reddish rocky ledges on the summit of a barren stony slope. Carter and Zeph were waiting for them here, and told them it was impossible to get the horses over it,—at any rate at that point.

“There must be some place to get up, though, for them pesky mules of ours have certainly gone

south of it," Zeph remarked, with better sense than grammar; and he added, "I'm going to look for a break."

By and by they heard a halloo, and saw him beckoning them to come. He had found a break in the ledges, sure enough, and more than that, for here was quite a plain path, which Andy declared must be either an Indian or a game trail, and plainly imprinted upon it were the small shoe-marks of several mules.

Braced up by this discovery, all fell into Indian file and began to climb the path, which led in and out among fallen rocks, sage-brush, and cedars, working its way gradually to the summit of the ridge. Zeph was leading the line and was therefore the first to reach the top; and the instant he got there, he first threw his cap into the air and began to dance, then suddenly stopped, threw up his hand in a warning gesture, and sinking to the ground placed his finger on his lips, as he looked back, as if to tell them to keep still and come on quietly.

Puzzled and excited, Annie slid off her horse, and all together they crept stealthily forward to the rocky parapet and peered over its edge, then grew wide-eyed and smiling with wonder and delight.

Just below lay a little valley between this and

a second line of low rocky bluffs; and in it a bright stream ran cool and clear through meadows and groves where their four mules and Carter's horse were grazing up to their knees in lush grass!

But why the caution and silence that had so abruptly succeeded the lad's first enthusiasm? Ah, *there* was the reason! A hundred yards away, on the edge of the damp, green lowlands, were half a dozen antelope, — a lordly buck with some does and young. The latter lay comfortably on the ground among the flowers, but the buck stood with uplifted head gazing at the figures upon the crest of the ridge. He might run in an instant, — the first movement might alarm him, — but as yet he was too curious and too little frightened (for the wind was blowing the wrong way to carry their scent to his suspicious nostrils) to do more than observe these objects he so little understood. How noble he looked as he stood there, lithe, alert, ready to spring away! Ah, why does he not go? Andy has already dropped upon one knee and is aiming carefully at that white spot upon the quivering breast, for it is a long shot. The rifle rings out, and the bullet goes straight to the mark. Rearing like an angry horse, the stricken buck topples backward and lies still, while his band, springing to their feet, stand an instant in

bewilderment and then scud away down the valley and out of sight over its green-gray rim.

“A pretty shot!” yells Carter, in admiration, and Zeph slaps his comrade’s broad back and sings out:—

“Bully for you!”

But the girls cannot help thinking of the lordly little buck slain in his prime, and are silent—even though they are in sore need of the flesh.

“Now you fellows keep quiet!” Andy commands. “We mustn’t scare those mules away. They’ve all heard the shot, and are ready to run now. Girls, you stay here with Chestnut and stop them if they come this way, while Zeph goes up-stream and Carter and I get below them. We’ll try to capture old Peggy first. If we can get *her*, it will be easy enough, I reckon, to catch the rest.”

But really there was no difficulty about it. The animals, in this fine pasture, were far more docile than out on the plain just after the terror of that storm. They seemed rather to welcome their masters, and in five minutes Carter’s horse and two of the mules had halters round their necks, and the others were following as meekly as if in their home pasture.

Then Andy waved his handkerchief to his

sisters, but the signal was not needed. Chestnut had broken away the moment he smelled the water, and was galloping at full speed to the stream, where he plunged his nose in up to his eyes, and drank as though he would never get filled. And it seemed as though he must have told Jim, for an instant later that horse, too, tore loose and rushed to the river, his cargo rattling like a runaway tinshop.

The girls were just as thirsty, but could not make such haste. Poor Annie was leaning on Cora's shoulder as if she could hardly walk. When the boys saw this, Carter ran to his brother's saddle, unlashd the cup hanging there, and filling it with cool water hastened to meet his sister before he himself had taken a drop of the delicious fluid.

This fresh water revived the worn-out girl, but the older boys declared she must not try to walk the rest of the way.

"We'll make a seat with our hands and carry you," said Zeph.

So they did, and took her tenderly to the root of a great cottonwood which grew beside the creek and shaded the flower-strewn bank.

Oh, how good that water tasted! They drank and drank, and bathed their faces; and feeling suddenly their great fatigue and the strain they

had been under, they could only lie on the grass and rest for a little while.

“How far do you think we have come?” asked Cora.

“I guess it is not more than twelve miles in a straight line; but we have wandered about a good deal, and I, for one, feel as if I had walked about a hundred.”

After a while the boys roused themselves and began to explore the valley. It was a hollow of perhaps a hundred acres, partly grassy prairies, partly groves, lying between two rocky ridges, and at the base of one, a couple of hundred yards above where Annie was lying, a great spring came boiling up in a stone basin rimmed about with green plants. Frogs leaped into it, newts darted to the bottom when any one approached, and a gorgeous wild duck fled noisily as the boys first reached its brim.

This was no ordinary spring, but one as big as a dooryard,—one you might swim in. The rocky wall above was marked with strange carvings and faded paintings—outlines that meant nothing mostly, but some rudely depicting what looked like figures of animals and men. Its overflow fed a deep stream which poured gayly along the valley, into and out of quiet pools, down small cascades, beneath long avenues of shade made by

the arching branches of cottonwood and aspen, willow and spruce, and then ran out into the sunshine; and the game had been so used to come here to drink that regular paths were to be seen leading down through thickets from the uplands.

But the most wonderful thing was the fate of this joyous current. Scarcely a quarter of a mile from where it was born in the bubbling spring, it turned sharply out of the meadow and entered a gap in the rough face of the farther ridge. Following it, by stepping from stone to stone along the edge next the rocky wall, you presently found yourself confronted by a pile of ledges which stood squarely across the stream. At their base was a low cavern, into which all the water seemed to be sucked with exceeding swiftness; and if you pushed on and placed your ear down to the mouth of the cavern-arch, you could hear the lost river plunging down and down in the darkness, and no one could sound the depths of its disaster or know the duration of its captivity.

But this marvel was as nothing beside the secrets the ledges themselves disclosed when the eyes of the wanderers were opened to perceive them.



CHAPTER XVI

CALLS FOR SYMPATHY WITH THE SICK

ANNIE was really ill. Though a delicious piece of broiled antelope steak had been prepared for her supper, with some nicely stewed pilot-biscuit and a juicy tuna, her interest could not be aroused, though she forced down a few mouthfuls, more to please her friends than herself. Doctor Andy did not urge her to eat.

There was no tent here, nor any canvas or waterproof cloth of any sort, but the sky showed no signs of rain, which falls only rarely in this region, although only a few miles from the mountains.

Arranging for her temporarily as soft a bed

upon the ground as spruce boughs and their few blankets would allow, the boys hastily put up a small hut, or bower, of poles, wattled with willow branches and thatched with leafy boughs, which served the purposes of shade and privacy even though not good for much in case of a storm. Into this Annie was moved before sundown, and made as comfortable as possible; but it was with troubled hearts that the circle gathered about the fire that evening, for the suffering of their sister not only made them sympathetic and sorrowful, but impressed upon even the youngest the gravity of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

The more they thought of it, the more serious their situation appeared. The more they studied the facts, the less they liked them. They were not likely to starve, it is true, for game seemed plentiful, and the ambulance contained a fair supply of ammunition for both rifle and shot-gun, not to speak of the little pistol carried by Carter — the secret delight of the lad's heart, but for which he had to stand no end of joking, all the more since his ridiculous adventure with the bear.

"Why, boy," Zeph roared out one day, "if you should shoot me with that thing, *and I found it out*, I'd spank you till you couldn't sit your saddle for a week."

Neither was there danger they would famish of thirst — the dread of the Southwest — now that this copious spring had been discovered. But these were only bright points in a picture most of which was immeasurably dark. It was well for them, as it is for all of us, that the future cannot be foreseen, for in our ignorance we become hardened to misfortunes gradually and get more enjoyment out of the unexpected favors of fortune.

Annie became decidedly worse as the evening wore on. Her body was filled with fever and racked with pain, and her stomach seemed altogether out of order. Andy watched her closely, but could see nothing very definite in her disease, and, although distressed, was not alarmed; he said it was too soon yet for decided symptoms to develop anyway. So when bedtime came, and Cora insisted that all should go to sleep around the fire, leaving her to serve as nurse, Andy set the example and the weary camp was soon quiet, the dogs being sentinels enough. At midnight Andy awoke and sent Cora to bed, himself taking her place beside the sick girl. She dozed more or less, but it was plain when the morning light came that she was worse — was, in fact, in the midst of a raging fever.

What could be done for her? The young physician's skill was of little use to him without

medicines, and the small family medicine-chest had been left behind with Mrs. Manning, no one thinking of a long separation or that anybody would fall ill. Burning with fever, Annie's cry was continuously for water, which at first Cora had refused her, except in very small draughts. But when Andy heard of this, he condemned it at once.

"Give her all she wants," he ordered.

"But all the doctors say you mustn't give a person with fever cold water."

"All the doctors be hanged! That is an old woman notion — no, it isn't, it's an old fool notion; old women of sense know better. Put a cup beside her and fill it up as fast as she empties it."

This was strange doctrine for that time, and Cora winced; but it wasn't the first time she had heard her brother scout some of the rules of the old-fashioned "faculty," and so she obeyed him. Nowadays a physician who refused water to a fever patient would be drummed out of the profession, but in Cora's time they were just beginning to come to the modern way of thinking on this and several other points in medicine. Andy did more than command water-drinking. He went out and gathered a handful of wild black currants from the bushes along the river, where they were plentiful, crushed them, and put their

juice into Annie's cup, giving a tart and pleasant flavor to the water, which everybody liked so well that all hands made this "shrub," and added the currants and sweeter service-berries to their sparse bill of fare. Suddenly Carter exclaimed:—

"I say, Doc, isn't quinine good for fever?"

"I should say it was — I wish to goodness we had some."

"It comes in pills, don't it?"

"Usually — sometimes in a powder."

"Well, there's a bottle of something in that old overcoat of father's in the ambulance. I saw it the other day when I was looking through the pockets after a fish-line. I'm almost sure it's quinine."

"But why should father have quinine in his overcoat pocket?"

"Don't you remember that stormy day when we were crossing the Raton Range (that's the last time he wore the coat) that father had a bad cold, and mother was all the time telling him to take quinine? I'll bet you he put a bottle of it in his pocket and it's been there ever since."

"By jiminy! I hope you're right! But that isn't here."

"No, but we can get it pretty quick. It's only a dozen miles back to the wagon, and if we rode hard, Zeph and I could go there and get back before night."

"Guess I'd better go."

"Oh, no!" Cora protested. "I don't want *you* to go away. I can't be left alone—"

"Well, I like that!" said Zeph, with a great show of indignation. "Hear the miss! 'All alone,' Carter, when you and I would be 'present or accounted for.' Why, she thinks *we're* nobody."

"Quit wasting your time and saddle up. I hate to send you youngsters on such a trip, but I don't see how it can be helped—and quinine would be *such* a blessing. And besides, Annie needs better food, which you can bring."

This was Andy's energetic way of settling the row, and no time was to be lost, for it was already seven o'clock, the conversation having taken place at breakfast.

The three made haste to catch and saddle the horses, and Cora wrote down a list of certain things she wanted, including flour, tea, sugar, and a few other things for the patient, whereupon Zeph proposed that Carter ride Chestnut and use old Peggy as a packhorse.

"We can bring a pile of stuff in the saddlebags and strapped to the saddle."

So that arrangement was quickly made.

"Are you sure you know the way?" asked Cora, with natural anxiety.

“Oh, yes. As soon as we get on top of the ridge here we can see the mountains, and then I know the point to steer by,—we learned that when we were hunting the horses.”

“But what will you steer by when you come back?”

“Oh, I think we can follow our trail or find our way. We’ll take good notice of the lay of the land.”

“I’ll set up a bushy pole for a landmark on the ridge,” Andy promised.

A few moments later the boys cantered off, carrying a rifle and with Nig at their heels, very careful not to step on the cactus, whose prickles had made her feet so sore, in spite of their hardening, that she had learned to avoid the thorny plants as if they were hot coals. Bimber, as usual, was in a peck of trouble, for he didn’t know whether he wanted to go or to stay, but Cora helped him to a decision by getting a good grip on the scruff of his neck.



CHAPTER XVII

DISCOURSES OF ANTIQUITIES AND SAGE-TEA

THE table-land had now been pretty thoroughly explored between the camp and the mountains, from the brink of the great canyon on the east to that on the west; but of what lay southward our wanderers had as yet learned nothing.

"I can't do any exploring till the boys come back and Nannie gets better," Andy told Cora; "but as I seem to be of no use here I'll climb those rocks that wall in the valley over there to the s'uth'ard and see what the country beyond them looks like."

"Don't go far," said the sister, anxiously.

"I won't; and if you want me, just throw an

armful of damp leaves on the fire to make a smoke. I'll be on the watch for the signal and come back on the jump."

Shouldering the shot-gun and walking down the brookside, Andy speedily came to the foot of the rough ridge, perhaps a hundred feet high, which, though sloping and grassy elsewhere, was crowned just here by low and broken cliffs or ledges of yellowish sand-rock, which bent inward into a sort of recess or alcove, toward the centre of which the river made its way into a ravine and disappeared down a cavern.

Scrambling up to the base of these ledges, Andy paused in astonishment, for wherever there was a shelf of rock broad enough to hold it, stood the ruins, or often the complete but roofless structure, of a small stone house, well built of squared blocks; while a long line of shallow caves in the face of the crags sheltered similar buildings, sometimes one filling a whole niche, while larger hollows contained several. The crags on the farther side of the river were equally studded with ruins.

Some of these houses were quite out of reach. Perhaps the rock had been worn away, or perhaps it had always been as abrupt as now, and the owners had reached their domiciles by means of ladders which they drew up at night or whenever

they cared to be alone. To many, however, access was easy, and in these Andy found sometimes only one room, but often two or three, partitioned by walls of stone or of sun-dried bricks (adobes), often smoothly plastered and tinted with a reddish clay-wash in which minute flakes of mica still glistened.

The more Andy saw of them the more he wondered who were the builders, and what was their history; and this wonder grew when at last he entered a good two-roomed house and was amazed to find ashes on the hearth and some bones near by, which he took to be those of a rabbit, that seemed as though thrown down only yesterday. He had seen in some of the other houses cedar beams, evidently as ancient as the walls, but these newer relics, and some tufts of fur and bits of buckskin lying about, completely puzzled him because they looked so fresh. This made him think of the recent signs of camping found under the shelter where they had bivouacked on the mesa; and he concluded that modern Indians occasionally spent the night in the shelter of these ancient buildings—which was a new subject of thought. Yet he had seen no other signs of Indians, and decided that these evidences might refer to a visit a year or more ago; at any rate there was no need to alarm

the girls by talking on the subject, at least until Nan was better.

Leaving these ruins after a hasty glance, he soon found a place where he was able to climb to the summit. This overlooked the valley, where he could easily see the smoke of the camp-fire, and commanded a wide prospect. As far as his sight could reach southward stretched a fairly level expanse of tawny, undulating plain, growing blue on the horizon. It was broken only by a rocky elevation, perhaps three miles away, crowned with crags. Between him and this rocky hillock, which he named in his own mind *The Butte*, he caught sight of a band of moving figures that he soon made out to be deer; but there was no sign of human life, nor was he able to study the shape of the lower part of the two great canyons which hemmed the mesa in on each side, but it was plain to be seen that their opposite walls were vertical escarpments, broken and carved into a line of most picturesque buttresses, towers, and pinnacles.

More and heavier ruins occupied this summit where he stood; and Andy studied them for some time, picking up many pieces of broken pottery marked with ornamental designs in red, yellow, and black; also two or three stone arrow-heads, — one beautifully chipped from that black vol-

canic glass common in Mexico and the southwestern United States, which mineralogists call obsidian.

"I'll have it mounted in gold as a breastpin for Nannie, as soon as I get to San Francisco," he said to himself, as he admired it; and that reminded him to take a look for a possible signal. But the only smoke to be seen was a thin blue wisp, so he concluded he was not needed, and extended his walk until he found himself west of the stream. Then he picked his way down the crags in a new place and started homeward. Here sage-brush grew abundantly, while it was uncommon in the valley. Andy idly plucked a few leaves and unthinkingly put them in his mouth, where their pungent, bitter taste made him spit them out quickly.

"Makes me think of grandmother and her sage-tea," he thought to himself.

Then he came to a full stop.

"Wonder if it wouldn't do Nan good. Of course this wormwood bush has nothing to do with the true sage herb of grandmother's garden that she set such store by, but Annie'll never think of the difference, and her faith will go farther toward curing her than the weed anyhow. I expect it'll taste mighty bitter, and that'll help. Most people have an idea that unless a medicine

tastes pretty bad it is not effective. What I want is to get a lot of hot water down her throat so as to start perspiration. But one can't drink much plain hot water, and we've got no lemons, so I'll just order 'sage-tea,' and say nothing about it. The hot water will do her good, and the bitterness won't harm her. In fact the Indians say these leaves are good for fever."

So thought the young physician as he plucked a pocketful of the small sage-green leaves and strolled into camp. .

"I'm 'fraid Nan's got mountain-fever," was Cora's greeting in an anxious tone. "That's a dreadful disease. Oh, if mamma were only here! What *shall* we do if they don't bring any quinine?"

"I guess not," was the cheerful answer. "She's caught cold and has overtaxed her strength, but we'll set her all O.K. if we can start a sweat. I'm not going to wait for the chance of quinine. We will put our trust in sweating and sage-tea," and he produced the leaves, but said nothing as to their nature.

So water was heated, blankets were collected, and Andy joked the patient gently on the ordeal preparing for her.

"Just as they nail dead hawks on a barn-door to encourage the rest," she responded with a wan sort of smile.

So the bitter tea was brewed — lots of it.

“It’s awful nasty, Nan dear,” said Cora, as she wrapped her sister up in blanket after blanket. “But it’s sure to do you good; and if only you can perspire well, you’ll be all right, I’m sure, by to-morrow.”

Annie gulped down a great cupful, making wry faces and sputtering over its heat and bitterness, but she felt too miserable to care much; and half an hour later she was perspiring until she feebly asked whether they meant to stew her all up like the sage-leaves.

“Well, hardly, Nannie; but just you stand it as long as you can.”

By and by the girl fell into a sleep. Sunset passed, Cora and Andy ate their supper, and still no boys came. As twilight deepened into darkness the campers grew really anxious, and Andy decided that he must build a fire on the ridgetop to guide the belated wanderers, since his flagpole would soon become invisible. So he started off with an armful of sticks and a large brand from the camp-fire, swinging it in the air to keep it alive.

Cora sat down wearily, and leaned her head against a tree by the door of the hut, where Annie was still asleep. She watched Andy’s waving spark, and presently saw his fire glowing

out in the darkness against the jewelled sky. The gurgle of the brook and the crunching of the grass by the mules near by were the only sounds to be heard. Her thoughts flew back to the old home and friends that seemed so far away and so long back; to the slow journey across the Plains, and the queer incidents in Santa Fé and since. She wondered for the thousandth time what mamma and papa were doing and thinking, and — Why, she must have been dozing, for here were all the boys and horses and she had never heard them come at all!

“Did you get it?” she called out as she sprang to her feet.

“Don’t know. There’s the bottle,” and Zeph pointed to Andy’s hands.

It was a small, dark-blue, wide-mouthed bottle, the label of which had become so worn it couldn’t be read, nor could the nature of its contents be well seen through the dark glass.

“Seems to have a powder inside it, but I don’t believe it’s quinine,” Andy muttered as he tugged at the stopper. He loosened it a little and smelled of it. “Not much! Smell that!” he ejaculated, pulling out the cork and thrusting it under Carter’s nose.

“Gosh all hemlocks!” the boy yelled, and began to dance and sneeze and swear vengeance.

“Gracious! what *is* it?” asked Cora.

“Hartshorn — smelling salts,” her brother told her, as he shut the bottle. “It’ll teach the lad to keep his nose out of other people’s affairs” — which was hard on the innocent youth, and not calculated to soothe him at all.

Then Zeph marched away with the horses, and neither boy said a word about how they came to be so late. This was the reason. They had seen at a distance on the prairie an Indian, and fearing to go on had hidden in a hollow. Whether he had noticed them or not they were not sure. After it became dark they started on, steering as well as they could by the stars — no easy task for beginners; and when they saw Andy’s fire, they became more frightened than ever, thinking it was an Indian camp. Zeph, however, seeing that it was in the proper direction, guessed it might be a beacon to guide them, and so after a while they crept nearer, and finally plucked up courage to approach it.

It was quite ten o’clock when they came in, so that Cora must have had a good nap; but Annie remained in quiet slumber, and no harm had been done by her lack of vigilance.



CHAPTER XVIII

EXPLAINS THE RECOVERY OF THE AMBULANCE

THE next was an idle day. Although the young patient was a trifle better, no one felt willing to leave her long, and the day was spent by the boys in rambling over the ruins and around the spring, examining the ancient architecture or collecting fragments of pottery and stone implements.

Carter went out with the shot-gun and brought back doves enough to make a delicious broth for Annie, and reported seeing many footprints of deer and antelopes which had stolen down to drink during the night. Wolf tracks were among them, and even the "spoor" of a puma,

although this last was not recognized at this time.

"I allow this is the only watering-place in a long piece of country," said Zeph, "and that the game comes here every night."

"We ought to lay for it some time," was Carter's sensible opinion.

"So we will. No danger of our starving, I guess; and if it wasn't for all the rest of it, I'd like nothing better than to fool 'round here till winter, hunting and loafing."

As the day wore on Annie felt her fever returning, and very readily agreed to Andy's and Cora's advice that she repeat the treatment of the night before.

"I hate that sage-tea," she told them. "But I think — yes, I am sure — it did me good, and I'll drink as much as I can, and try to kill this fever to-night. I don't ache so much as I did, and I don't believe it's mountain-fever I have, but only a plain, ordinary one. I'm bound to get over it, anyhow, and right away, too!"

This courageous way of talking was the best medicine she could have given herself, but she didn't think of that, putting all her faith in the sage-tea.

So she shut her eyes and took a tremendous dose of the hot mixture, and then lay tightly

rolled in blankets until after a while she fell into another deep sleep, which continued unbroken till almost morning, so that Cora, lying near her, was not disturbed once. And when the sun rose, and the girl waked up, her eyes were bright, her skin cool and moist, and her fever had quite gone, taking all the pains and distress with it.

"I'm awfully weak and sleepy," she confessed, "but I'm going to get well right away, as I told you I would. Three cheers for sage!—but oh, it was bitter!"

It was a joyful group, then, that gathered around the breakfast table, and their talk was of what should be the next move.

"I think we ought to get the ambulance, or at any rate what is in it, and bring it here before anything else."

"Why, Cora, we don't need anything from it, hardly," said Andy, "except some more of the ammunition, and maybe the provisions."

"'Ammunition, and maybe the provisions'! That ain't half! Nan and I both need other clothes, and so do you boys," persisted this practical young housekeeper. "We ought to have means to wash our clothing, too, and the tent, and, in fact, the wagon itself. I don't propose to live outdoors nobody knows how long, and certainly Nan ought to have a better place. Sup-

posing it had rained while she was lying sick in that shanty — or even now for that matter. She'd surely take cold if she got wet, and I've often heard mamma say that many a person has died because they caught cold after a sickness. I tell you we *must* have the ambulance with us wherever we go."

"I guess you're right," Andy agreed.

"But how are we going to get it?" Carter objected. "Girls never think of trouble."

"Don't they?" retorted his sister. "Seems to me you're thinking *too much* of trouble! How do you know that everything won't be stolen by the Indians? You say they are around here. All you have to do is to take the mules and work awhile to dig out a road up the ridge."

Cora was tired and sleepy, or perhaps she wouldn't have been so — no, not cross, but forcible. But this strong way of talking about the matter was just what was needed. The young men had their faces set on further exploration, and in their own rude health and strength had forgotten the girls' necessity for greater comforts and conveniences.

At any rate Andy took her part, and by and by Zeph came over, and then Carter's grumbling didn't matter; moreover, Zeph warned him presently that if he didn't quit growling, he'd

punch his head. Carter dared him to try it, but "shut up" all the same, for he was not a bad fellow, nor a very foolish one.

After all the boy was not called upon to take part in this to him disagreeable job, for it was arranged that he might stay in camp, while Andy and Zeph took the mules (riding two and leading the other span) back to the wagon and did their best to bring it up.

Before noon they went away and by three o'clock had reached the wagon, finding everything just as they had left it. Hitching up they dragged the ambulance to the foot of the bench at the chosen place, and then went to work to clear away rocks, cut down trees, and make an excuse for a road until it became too dark to do anything more.

Then they got themselves some bacon and sea-biscuits out of the wagon for supper, built a good fire, and went early to sleep, for they were too tired to sit up and talk, as one is so tempted to do when fragrant, dry cedar logs are burning before you and the tree-tops and sky alone are overhead.

Next morning they went at it again almost as soon as it was light enough to see. The greatest difficulty was an abrupt wall near the top—the front of a rocky ledge about six feet high. Upon

this their pick made no impression, and they had to sit down and study the problem very carefully. One plan was to unload the wagon, take it to pieces, and lift it up little by little; but it was evident this would be too long a job, even if it were practicable for two persons to do it at all. The greatest haste was necessary, not because they felt obliged to return by a certain time, but because they had only a bottle full of water between them, and there was almost none for the mules — no more than a little muddy residue in the rocky basin. The extreme dryness of the air and the hot sunshine dry up a pool wonderfully quickly in that region. Finally they concluded to put up a slanting bridge. To do this they cut down two large trees for logs for side-beams, and with much labor and ingenuity leaned them in a proper way against the wall and braced them there. Next they cut smaller sticks and laid them across to form the "planks" of the incline, weighting their ends with stones, and filling up the interstices with saplings and brush.

It was very slow and very hard work, but they kept at it until noon, when it was nearly finished; and then they allowed themselves time for a cold lunch, and to go a second time to the edge of the cliffs of the great chasm. It was rather deeper than before, and what seemed a permanent stream

was rushing along its channel. It was impossible to get down, and no sign was visible of any person on the other side. An hour more was required to finish the bridge and its approach, and another hour of patient work to persuade the scary mules to trust themselves and drag their load up this novel and precarious-looking roadway; but by three o'clock the last straining pull and push had been given, the top was reached, and a few moments later they were driving post-haste over the prairie toward home.

Home! How speedily one learns to put this name upon any place where his dear ones and his household goods happen to be. That rude little camp in that remote and nameless glen was as far as possible from what these young people had been accustomed to call *home*; yet the word fell naturally from their lips, albeit uttered a little sadly.

The sun was just setting when they rattled down the last ridge into the valley, and the hearty gratitude and good supper with which they were met went a long way toward driving away fatigue.



CHAPTER XIX

SHOWS HOW THE PILGRIMS MADE THEMSELVES
COMFORTABLE; AND ALSO —

THE next morning, well rested and with Annie on the road to recovery, Andy felt free to begin the reconnoissance he had long been anxious to make. He intended to take Zeph with him, but Carter begged to go, and Zeph volunteered to take care of the camp, and do a lot of the "chores" which he declared ought to be attended to. So two horses were saddled early and the brothers rode away, eager and hopeful of finding an opening out of their difficulties.

Zeph and Cora at once went to work. They got the tent out of the wagon, first off, and set

it up in a delightful grassy spot a little way from their present accidental quarters. Two of the horse-blankets formed the cushion of the driver's seat, and one of these was spread down as a carpet, its corners pegged to the ground. Then the cots were drawn from their places in the wagon and set up in the tent, and Annie's small trunk put near the head pole.

"Now for the young lady herself," Zeph called out. "You tell Miss Annie that in one minute by the sun I am going to pick her up in my 'strong young arms,' as the story-books say, carry her over there, and lay her in her little bed."

The girl protested that she could walk, but Zeph wouldn't hear of it, and carried out his promise as well as the invalid, who was vastly pleased with the change.

Then the boy dug a trench and walled it with stones, and put one or two flat ones across the top, and so made a sort of stone stove, which facilitated cooking operations very greatly. This fireplace was for kitchen use exclusively, and was near the tent, while the camp-fire was in another place. When he had brought from the ambulance one of the cupboard-chests to serve as a table, a great deal of comfort had been added to the camp, and it was luncheon time. Cora put a bouquet of wild blossoms on the table, — exquisite colum-

bines larger and more delicately varied in tint than ever seen in the east, gaudy sunflowers with orange centres, scarlet painter's brush, roses and rose-tinted cactus-flowers, feathery tufts of white sage, and many a little blossom she did not know; and the table was set where Annie could look at it from her couch when the flaps of the tent were folded back. It was a beautiful quiet day, sunny but not too warm in the shadow of the tall cottonwood over their heads.

"It is just a week since we landed on these inhospitable shores," Zeph remarked.

"And to-day is Sunday," said Annie. "Did you know it?"

"Is it? I must confess I hadn't kept track," the boy answered. "Then it must 'a' been on a Saturday night we ran that race against the wash-out. Jerusalem, but that was a storm!"

"And it was on a Sunday that Nan and I were so frightened at being left alone, and you boys chased so hard after the lost horses," said Cora. "Well, I guess we'll be forgiven, for *that* was certainly a work of necessity."

"I allow it was," Zeph agreed. "You know the Bible says that if one's ass falls into a ditch on that day, it's all right to pull it out; and we thought sure our mules—and they're part ass, you know—had fallen into a hole of some sort;

they came mighty near going into a deeper ditch than any of those fellows in Palestine ever saw, I reckon.”

“Yes, I guess not even Dr. Phinney himself would have objected to our working *that* day — or to what we have done to-day.”

“Dr. Phinney?” Zeph repeated in a tone of curiosity. “Who is he?”

“A minister who went about the country a few years ago holding great revival meetings, where everybody got tremendously excited. Papa heard him, and thought he was too strict in his notions for anybody to live up to; and mamma told me the other day, when we were talking about him, that he is now president of a big Congregational college at Oberlin, in Ohio, where they try to educate every boy to be a minister and every girl to be a minister’s wife. It must have been a very queer school at the start, but papa told us it was ‘getting civilized’ gradually, and even Dr. Phinney was mellowing some as he grew older.”

“I’ve got a job of mercy for this afternoon, anyhow,” Zeph continued. “Chestnut’s back has been galled by carrying those packhorse loads without a pack-saddle, and I want to wash the sores well, if I can find some soap.”

He went to the wagon and rummaged about,

but soon came back to say that not a cake could he find of any sort.

"Can't you? I've got only a little piece, and Nan and I want that. It won't last long either," and Cora looked much disturbed.

"Oh, Cote," Annie called out, "couldn't you find some soaproot about here?"

"What's that?"

"Some kind of Spanish bayonet. I saw Mexican women washing with it in one of the villages, and they told me about it."

"Lots of Spanish bayonet out on the mesa," said Zeph. "I'll go and dig some up and see what we get."

He and Bimber ran off and presently came back with a lot of thick, parsnip-like roots which he said were of two kinds. They put slices of one in a cup of hot water, but it had no more effect than so many chips. But when they tried the other, and stirred them around vigorously, the pieces became slippery and gradually produced a soft and excellent lather. So that want was met. Chestnut's back was well washed and healed, and there was no more lack of soap in the camp.

The sun had sunk behind the trees of the western side of the valley, and they had begun to grow anxious about the explorers, when a shout was

heard, and they rode slowly into the valley, with faces far from bright.

Zeph noticed the depression, but said nothing as he took the horses and began to unsaddle them. Carter threw himself on the ground as if fagged out, and Andy went at once to the tent.

"Why, Andy, what's the matter?" Cora exclaimed as he entered. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"Oh, it's nothing," he answered, mustering a smile. "I am tired. How's Nan?"

"I'm getting along famously," that young lady reported herself. "I really ate some dinner to-day, and shall sit up to-morrow, I guess."

"That's grand! But be careful. We can give you plenty of time to get well, and you mustn't catch a fall backward. Nice girls are scarce, and when we get one, we like to keep her. But I only came in to 'tell you howdy,' as the Georgians say, and must go and bathe my eyes and get a cool drink. It was like a furnace out on the mesa, and I am almost used up with heat and thirst."

"Poor Andy! I'm so sorry! But come in again, by and by, and tell me what you saw."

Cora followed him out of the tent.

"Andy, I know better. Something has happened. Were you chased by Indians?"

"Never saw a redskin. Only wish I had."

“Why do you say that?”

“Because he might have helped us.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“I mean that Carter and I followed the edge of the cliffs along the side of the gulch over there on the west until they curved 'round and joined the cliffs that border the eastern gulch, and nowhere, all the way 'round, for miles and miles, could we find any place where even a goat could get down.”

“Why — why — that's impossible. There *must* be *some* place!”

“Maybe so; but we couldn't find it. This prairie around us here is the top of a big flat hill with sides like a wall. A week ago it was joined on to the mountains; but when that cloudburst swept away the neck of land, it just left the whole thing a prairie up in the air, and we and everything else on it are just as much prisoners as if we were on an island in the ocean — more so, for then we could make a boat and sail away, and here we've got to make a flying-machine or else jump off.”

“What shall we do?”

“I give it up. That's too hard a conundrum for me yet.”



CHAPTER XX

REPORTS A SERIOUS BUT NOT VERY SOLEMN COUNCIL- OF-WAR

ALL the party soon learned the news, but not much was said about it until after supper had been eaten and various little chores were out of the way. Then, the evening as usual being cool, a fire of dry cedar was built near the door of the tent, so that Annie might enjoy its warmth, light, and fragrance — it smelt like a heap of lead-pencils burning, she told them — and could join in the consultation.

“One thing’s sure,” she offered as a starter. “I am going to get well between this and to-mor-

row night, and be up and around next day as good as ever."

"And twice as handsome," said Zeph, gallantly.

"So we are really prisoners on this mesa, are we?" Cora quietly remarked. "What shall we do if we can't get down?"

"Wait until somebody comes and takes us down, I suppose," said Andy.

"Father's around somewhere looking for us, you bet!" Carter exclaimed.

"But what good can it do if he finds us?" Cora demanded impatiently. "If we can't get *down* the cliffs, how in the world is he going to get *up*? I wish you had some sense."

This was a little hard, because the boy hadn't proposed anything at all; but Cora was tired and excited.

"Are you *sure*," Annie broke in, "that there is *no* way down to the valley?"

"We couldn't see any. The cliffs are just like the side of a house all the way 'round."

"How high are they?"

"Well, they run from a hundred feet or so back where the washout was, and where we came over on that unlucky night, to twelve or fifteen hundred feet at the southern end. You see this is a regular mesa."

“What do you mean by a ‘mesa’?” Zeph inquired, properly pronouncing the word *mayza*.

“A flat-topped table-land. It’s the Spanish word for ‘table.’ This one is fifteen or sixteen miles long and rather balloon-shaped. The narrower part is up near the mountains, and it got cut through by the cloudburst, as we know. Perhaps there was originally a gap there, between the sandstone strata of the mesa and the massive rocks of the mountain, which had long ago got filled up with gravel and earth and now has been washed out. That must be so or it couldn’t have gone so rapidly. Then a great gulch has been slowly eaten out on each side, both opening into another big valley across the lower end, where the mesa is perhaps two miles wide. Those lands that look like hills east and west of us are the tops of other mesas pretty much like ours, I suppose. There’s a line of ’em all along in front of the base of the range. I guess the whole country was up to this level once, but the rocks are soft sandstone, and old rivers have cut deep channels down from the mountains, leaving these highlands between them.”

“I tell you what *I* think,” said Cora, decisively.

“What’s that, sis?”

“That we’ve just got to creep along the edge and look at every bit of the cliffs. I dare say

we'll find some place where we can work our way down, at any rate, with ropes and shovels to help us. Aren't there ledges and rough places here and there?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm sure we'll find some place where we can crawl from ledge to ledge and zigzag along till we get out. Why, we'll starve to death here in a little while."

"Oh, no, we won't," said Zeph.

"Why, Zeph, our provisions won't hold out more than three or four weeks, the very best we can do. I wish you fellows didn't eat so much!"

"That don't mean starvation," Zeph persisted. "There are deer, and antelope, and birds enough here to keep us two years, and we'll get away by hook or crook long before that time anyhow."

"But no one likes to live on nothing but meat," said Annie.

"Therefore," Andy interrupted, "we must go slow on other provisions, and make them last. We can get tunas and berries and piñon-nuts; but, as Zeph says, we must depend mainly on game."

"If worst comes to worst," said Carter, gravely, "we can kill our horses."

"What! eat Chestnut?" cried Annie.

“Horse-chestnuts are pretty poor grub,” Zeph remarked sadly.

The boys laughed, but the girls were simply scornful. To make such a heartless jest on their pet pony — and so *bad* a one!

“Now you youngsters may joke,” said Andy, “but we’re certainly in a hole.”

“In a *hole!*” exclaimed Cora. Then it was the turn of the girls to make merry.

“Oh, you know what I mean — we are in a fix — a scrape — a difficulty — and I don’t think we’ll get out of it in a hurry. There’s no use crying about it, of course, but we’ve got to buckle down to some hard work, and, as Cora said a minute ago, just *search* those cliffs as if we were looking for a gold-mine. We’ll never see any gold-mine till we *do* find the stairs, that’s sure!”

Andy was as serious as could be, but there was no subduing his crew that night, and out of the shadowy tent came a clear voice singing, —

“Oh, Susanna, don’t you cry for me,
For I’m goin’ to Californy with
A gold-pan on my knee.”

Nevertheless they did some pretty solid thinking and talking before they went to bed, and finally laid out a plan of work something like this: A hunt should be undertaken first, and a

supply of meat secured; and the girls should gather and dry as many berries as they could find. After these arrangements had been completed, a regular survey of the cliffs should be begun in the hope of discovering a way to get down.

This plan required them to make long journeys every morning and evening to and from the place where each day's exploration was done; but there was no easier way, for nowhere else on the mesa, so far as they knew, was any water to be found, except in this curious little valley with its huge spring and extraordinary river, which had so brief and merry a life and so mysterious an end.



A deer hunt

CHAPTER XXI

NOTES PREPARATIONS FOR A CAMPAIGN

ALL were out of bed early next morning. The weather promised a bright, cloudless day, the air was crisp and cool, the rich warbling of a black-headed grosbeak rang from the rock-maples like the tinkling sound of water dropping melodiously, and out on the upland prairie a meadow-lark soared and whistled that delicate song never heard in the east—the sweetest of western bird-music.

Every one was full of hope, and even Annie insisted upon getting up and sitting by the fire, while Cora and Carter cooked their scanty breakfast.

“If there’s one thing more than another to be

thankful for," Cora remarked, "it is that that coffee-box happened to be full. But we've got to use it economically all the same. Can't have it more than once a day, and not much then."

This was the day to be devoted to hunting, and the moment they had finished eating the two older boys were ready to start. Zeph caught up the horses, Cora prepared a pocketful of luncheon for each, and Andy had picked up his rifle, when Bimber began to make a great row at the edge of the little grove.

"What's the matter with the dog?" Andy muttered, and strode off to find out. He was hardly out of sight when they heard him fire, and half a minute later he came back.

"What did you shoot at?"

"Black-tailed deer. I killed him. Better go and fetch him in," was the careless answer, as though it was a daily occurrence of no consequence.

But no one else took it so coolly, and the whole crowd started on a run. It was a fine doe, and gave meat enough for a week. But how to keep it was the question.

"I expect," said Andy, "that we'd better do as the Indians and plainsmen do and 'jerk' it."

"What's that?"

"Cut the flesh into strips and dry it in the sun.

But that is too large a job for you girls. So we will carry it into a cool place by the river and skin and gralloch it and hang it up, and perhaps to-morrow we may dry it."

This was done, and delayed them perhaps an hour, when they mounted their horses and rode away, each with his rifle, in search of more game.

They rode southward, keeping their eyes open right and left, but for a long time nothing appeared but jack-rabbits, and a couple of great rattling cranes, which Zeph was tempted to shoot at, but couldn't afford the ammunition. Away off near the southern extremity of the mesa could be seen, sharp and clear against the sky, and as blue as a sapphire, the roughly outlined crags of the Butte.

"Let's go down there," Zeph proposed. "Deer like to stay around such a place, and I'd like to see it anyhow."

Heading their horses in that direction, they broke into a gallop which carried them in two minutes to the top of a swell in the prairie, and as they rose above it, what should they see but a band of antelope — half a dozen of them, scurrying away down the slope. The horses caught sight of the game at the same instant and did not need the touch of the spurs. Away they rushed down the long slope, stretching out their legs,

reaching forward their noses, and racing neck to neck.

But the antelope could run too. Seeing that they were really being chased, and now thoroughly alarmed, they bounded forward, exciting the horses to increased efforts to overtake them. Straight on ran the chase, up and down slopes, now leaping some clump of sage-brush or a patch of low and thorny greasewood, now flying over a badger-hole, now up one of the low swells and then down another. Two or three times the riders were nearly raked off by the low limbs of some piñon, and again were scratched by the twigs of a cedar as they brushed past. It was a glorious ride, but a little too much like a runaway, and —

“There, it has come at last!” thought Zeph, as he went flying over his horse’s ears out toward the horizon. He landed in a bunch of sage-brush, which was only a shade better than in a bed of cactus, and came to his senses to see Andy dashing pell-mell up the next ridge and his own horse struggling out of the gopher-hole into which he had stumbled, and then careering after his mate.

Zeph gathered these facts into his half-dazed head just in time to scramble to his feet and wave his hand to Andy as he disappeared. He was scratched and sore in a dozen places, but not seriously hurt, and hobbled over to where his gun

lay on the ground, half full of dust, and sat down again to examine and clean that precious article. It, too, seemed to have escaped without serious harm, and he at once set about putting it in order. To try to follow the runaways on foot was useless, so he limped to the top of the nearest swell and lay down to wait until they should come back.

The air was still and warm, a few massive and snow-white clouds floated across the azure canopy above him, and in the north the creamy San Juan crests, supported by pedestals of blue and brown now very distinctly in view, were magnificent in their serene and solid grandeur and in their harmony of coloring. Watching them in dreamy fashion, perhaps he fell asleep; but at any rate he suddenly awoke to the fact that two antelopes were trotting toward him over the back of the next low ridge.

Zeph happened to be lying upon his face at full length in the tall grass, and his rifle was within easy reach. Drawing it carefully toward him, he brought it slowly to his shoulder. The animals were too far off as yet, and they had a restless way of running and then stopping, jumping about, halting and looking back, which would have made a shot difficult even had they been near.

He concluded, therefore, that these must be

two of those that Andy had been chasing, which had separated from the band, but were not yet over their fright. Antelopes are full of curiosity, and Zeph remembered that hunters sometimes tolled them up within range by lying down and kicking up their heels or waving a handkerchief; but he reasoned that that plan would not work now, because these animals were frightened and suspicious to the last degree. There was not a particle of shelter behind which he could creep nearer to the game, and he was at his wits' end how to obtain a shot, when he heard a faint halloo away off beyond them. Then another. The antelopes also heard the noise, raised their heads and pricked up their ears. At the second shout they sprang into a gallop, showing plainly that they felt themselves again pursued and meant to lose no time in getting a long start.

Zeph's grip tightened on his rifle. This was his last chance. If they kept straight on, they would pass by him at no great distance.

As rapidly yet with as little motion as possible, he screwed his body around into a better position and waited. The fleet pair, panic-stricken and breathless, darted on, and in two minutes were breasting the ridge where he lay. When they had reached the top, and were perhaps a hundred yards distant, he would fire. Ten seconds later



“ The buck leaped into the air, while the doe darted away.”

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they were there. The boy held his breath, took a quick glance along the barrel, aiming at the buck's fore shoulder, and pulled the trigger. The thud of the bullet came plainly to his ears, and the buck leaped into the air, while the doe, turning on her heels, as on a pivot, darted away with frantic speed. Then a loud call rang over the prairie, and Andy came loping across the hollow, leading the captured horse, and hastening to learn what the shot meant.

The story was as Zeph had suspected. Andy's excited horse had become almost ungovernable, and, seeing Zeph pick himself up unhurt, the Doctor went straight on. The antelopes had scattered, and finally his nag stopped because it had no more breath left.

So the pair returned proudly to camp long before sundown, with meat enough for the present, and a good story to tell, and cleaned and hung the antelope beside the deer.

But the end of this day's adventures was not yet.

Supper was over, and the lovely hour of twilight, made more lovely to-night by a moonrise, had come. Cora and Annie, who, true to her promise, was now nearly restored to health, started for a little stroll up the stream. They had been gone perhaps fifteen minutes when the boys lying

about the fire were astonished to see them come flying back.

“There’s an Indian in the spring,” gasped Cora. “He’s lying down and moaning terribly. O dear, what *can* it mean!”

The three lads sprang to their feet, each seizing the nearest weapon.

“We’ll soon see,” said Andy, grimly, and strode off, with the others at his heels.

Three minutes brought them to the spring, and to a redman prone upon its bank with one foot and ankle in the water.

The instant this figure was perceived Andy, checking the oncoming group by a motion of his left hand, threw the shot-gun up to his shoulder and fired.



CHAPTER XXII

EXHIBITS A SURGEON'S SKILL IN AN EMERGENCY

STARTLED at the report of the gun, the Indian struggled into a sitting posture, and his hand clutched at the rude haft of a knife hanging in a beaded sheath at his belt; but seeing who were approaching, he dropped back again with a groan, murmuring hoarsely two words, which no one but Andy understood, or perhaps heard, —

"Culebra! Aguardiente!"

"A rattlesnake has bitten him! Look there — I shot it," and Andy pointed to a brown reptile writhing on the rocks just beyond. "I'll be back in a minute."

Before any one could ask why, he was running

away toward camp as fast as his long legs could carry him. Zeph smashed the snake quite dead with a stone and then tossed its body out of sight among the rocks.

In five minutes Andy was back, bringing a tall, black bottle, opening it with the corkscrew which was one of the implements in a wonderful knife whose handle was full of small tools—a sort of pocket tool-chest which every pioneer of those days sought to possess.

“It’s some of father’s medicinal whiskey that by good luck was left in the ambulance, and here’s my pocket surgical case, and that precious bottle of hartshorn you found the other day in the coat. It’ll be worth its weight in gold to that redskin.”

It was surprising and interesting to every one in the little circle to see what a change had come over their brother. He was no longer the careless, boyish woodsman and comrade. He had suddenly become a capable surgeon, swiftly and silently doing the right thing, and no one dreamed of interfering by word or deed.

Mixing a cup of whiskey and water, he placed it at the lips of the man whose head Zeph supported, and whose senses and energies were fast becoming benumbed by the potency of the poison. The Indian drank it eagerly, and then a second cup, while the girls looked on in a pitying amazement.

"Won't it make him awfully drunk?" asked Annie.

"No — its stimulation will all be expended in keeping the heart going; and that's what I want just now."

The Indian had been struck on the great toe. The foot and leg were already greatly swollen, and when Andy had stripped off the moccasin and slit up the tight buckskin legging, he found the skin around the puncture, where only a single fang had penetrated, a greenish black, and this baneful color was spreading.

Taking from his case a lancet the doctor deeply lanced the wound, the Indian showing little sign of pain, and then when the blood was spurting freely, made with his handkerchief a ligature about the calf of the leg, twisting it as tight as he could by the help of a stick which was then tied firmly in place. This done Andy took some of the pasty hartshorn out of the vial, into which he had poured a few drops of water, and pressed it into the wound.

"I wish it were pure ammonia," he muttered. "But it may do the business."

Then he diluted some of it with more water, and taking from his case a small, needle-pointed hypodermic syringe he thrust it into a vein in the foot and injected the liquid two or three times. By

the time this operation was concluded the patient had fainted.

“Here — get water, somebody, and bring him to. This won’t do!”

Carter rushed down to the spring and brought a hatful of water which was dashed into the dark, wrinkled face. Gradually consciousness returned, and the man opened his eyes with a start of surprise and fear, only to shut them immediately with pain. A moment later, however, he revived somewhat, and whispered in rough Spanish: —

“Give me my wallet.”

But no one could find it until Annie noticed beneath the man’s body something like a leather haversack twisted into the horsehair rope which was wound about his waist in many folds. Unwinding this, and loosening its fastenings, they handed it to the savage, who, arousing himself with an effort, aided by another sip of liquor, drew from it various queer articles, until at last he found some dried stems and leaves of a small plant, which he stuffed into his mouth and chewed as though they were the sweetest morsels he had ever tasted.

“That is some herb he knows or thinks will cure him,” said Andy, and offered no objection when the old man — for it was evident he was well advanced in years — worked himself forward

until he could again plunge his foot and leg into the spring.

"He says the water is healing."

"I allow he's right," Zeph remarked. "I remember seeing a horse in Kansas which was bitten in the nose by a rattler. He went to the river and stayed there, keeping his head, which was 'most as big as a barrel, under water all the time; just lifted his nose out to take a breath, and then back again. They said he'd been there two days, and was getting well."

Nothing further could now be done, and all sat down and waited for the development of symptoms, better or worse.

"What good do the ammonia and whiskey do him?" Annie asked, examining curiously the little hypodermic injector. "Are they antidotes of the poison?"

"Not exactly, but they set up a counteraction and repair the damage — at any rate the ammonia does. You see, the effect of the venom is not only to paralyze the nerve-centres to a greater or less degree, but to decompose the blood, causing the red particles in it, called 'corpuscles,' to separate from the other constituents and form clots, which, if the trouble goes on far enough, produces death. The effect of ammonia, or any other strong alkaline substance, — I should have used

permanganate of potash if I had had it, — is to prevent this, restore the blood to its normal condition, and so repair the evil. As for the whiskey, that aids by stimulating the system generally, but especially by increasing the action of the heart, thus pumping the blood more rapidly and forcibly through the arteries and overcoming stagnation. But it is worse than useless to fill a man full of whiskey as they sometimes do. I believe in more than one case they have killed with alcohol a patient that might otherwise have got well. It all depends, after all, upon how much of the venom gets into the system.”

While listening to this explanation Zeph had been looking at the moccasin which had been taken off the Indian's foot. Its toe showed a single puncture only, and about it was a little ring of greenish, frothy moisture.

“It's plain the varmint got only one fang in, and that a good deal of the poison was wiped off on this leather,” he said.

“Yes,” Andy agreed. “I guess he got a light dose or his leg would have swollen more. I think he'll pull through, but I mean to give him another injection before it gets too dark to work.”

He spoke to the Indian, who was too stupefied to seem to understand, and made no objection to

the operation, but went on sleepily chewing the wad of dried leaves.

"Do you suppose it is really some sort of antidote he is chewing?" somebody asked.

"I shouldn't wonder. They say the Indians *do* know such plants; and they say that when a deer is bitten, it will eat a certain plant and cure itself."

"Do you believe it, Andy?"

"I am not sure but I do. I know that there are plants in Michigan that are called rattlesnake weeds. They would be of no use, but that doesn't prove there may not be something good here."

It was now dark.

"Carter," said Andy, "you and Cote go back to camp and brisk up the fire, and take the horse-blankets and other things and fix up as good a bed as you can in the hut. Zeph and I will rig up some kind of a stretcher and take our friend into camp. Bring me one of the blankets."

"Take him to *our* camp?" cried Cora, in alarm.

"Why, of course! You wouldn't leave him out here to perish of cold or to be jumped on by a mountain-lion, would you?"

"I didn't know any mountain-lions were 'round here," exclaimed the girl, forgetting her dread of Indians in this new suggestion of another peril.

"I don't know that there are, but it is likely enough."



CHAPTER XXIII

WHEREIN IS RECORDED A THRILLING ADVENTURE

A RUDE stretcher was easily contrived out of two poles and a horse-blanket, upon which the Indian, who could do little or nothing to help himself, was borne to camp. Andy said he would come out of the stupor presently, but would probably be ill, weak, and full of pain for several days.

Here was another set-back in their plans, and another sick member of the little community to be cared for; and the girls, especially, were completely disgusted.

"I wonder why he is all alone," Cora said. "I thought Indians always travelled in bands."

"Oh, not always," she was told; "but they do

generally go about in family parties at least, and it *is* curious that this old fellow is alone. I wonder if it is the one who frightened you girls so much the other day?"

"Well," Cora confessed, "as to that I can't say. He don't look so terrible as that one did, but then it's different now. If so, very likely he is the same one that Zeph and Carter afterward saw, and who left the rabbit bones in that house on the rocks."

By the time the patient, still in a dazed condition, had been made comfortable, midnight had nearly come, and everybody was well tired out. Carter, however, who had had the easiest day's work, agreed to sit up to look after the fire and the Indian while the rest of the camp went to bed. In general, of course, nobody played sentinel: the two dogs attended to that.

The illness which Dr. Andy had predicted, followed, and for several days little could be done by anybody except nurse the old man and keep meat in the larder. The experiment of "jerk-ing" venison did not succeed. The meat spoiled instead of drying hard and sound, and the boys concluded something was wrong with their method of preparation.

On one of these waiting days Carter proposed to carry out his idea of lying in wait for game

which came nightly to drink from the river. The older brother agreed, and the methods of African hunters were to be imitated by building a sort of "blind" or place of concealment where they could watch to the best advantage. A spot was therefore chosen in the afternoon near the water beside a certain game-trail some distance below the camp where their guns could command the bank at the most likely drinking point, and there a shallow pit was dug and surrounded by a low barricade sufficient to hide them. After supper, however, Andy confessed he didn't feel like sitting out the night, and asked Zeph to take his place.

Just at moonrise the boys took their rifles, and having tied Nig so that she would not follow them, prepared to begin their vigil. Then Cora suddenly announced that she meant to go too. Carter sneered and Zeph argued, but the girl declared that if she couldn't do them any good, she would do no harm, and she wanted to see the fun; and the upshot of it was that the young lady had her way, and Bimber also had to be tied up, for where his mistress went he proposed to go too, and this time he wasn't in the least wanted. But it is difficult to make a dog comprehend that "circumstances alter cases," and he whined and cried at the end of his rope until even Nig commanded him to shut up.

All three nestled down inside the barricade and waited and watched. The night was cool, although it was now midsummer, and Cora was soon glad that she had brought a blanket. A July moon was shooting its beams through the scant and trembling foliage of the cottonwoods that overhung the stream, and doing its best to penetrate the darkness that lurked among the underbrush. The gentlest of breezes fluttered the topmost leaves, yet scarcely made any noise, and the gurgle and tinkle of the water dashing over the pebbles were the only sounds to break the stillness of the great wilderness in which they were almost alone, and apparently deserted. That this still-hunting, which now seemed merely an amusement, might soon become a regular occupation, upon which the lives of the party would depend, was a thought that in one form or another came into the minds of all three. Thought is free, and the imagination expands in the silence and greatness of a night out of doors. The "influences of the stars" tend to make every soul serious, if not sad, and to impress upon those who are in trouble or danger the full weight of whatever rests upon their hearts.

How long these reveries lasted it would be hard to say; but the moon had risen until its beams were poured straight down upon the nar-

row game-path that led to the river's brink before a sudden grip upon Zeph's hand by Cora's fingers warned him that her quick ears had detected some unusual noise.

"Listen!" she whispered. "What's that?" And if her hand trembled a little in his, it should not be surprising, when we think how strange a situation for a young girl this was.

Zeph heard the sound now, — a *pit-pat, pit-pat* coming nearer and louder, until at last a dark form, very vaguely outlined, was dimly visible among the shadows toward the river.

And just at that instant, to their dismay and rage, Bimber came flying from the rear into their retreat, wagging his tail, climbing into Cora's arms, and licking her face in the extravagant way these fond fox-terriers have. His collar jingled, but by good luck the dog did not bark, and Cora instantly muffled him under her blanket.

"I see it — plain!" whispered Carter, excitedly. "It's a deer — I see its horns."

"Can you get a bead on its head or shoulder?" Zeph whispered back.

"Yes — first rate."

"Fire, then!"

Carter needed no further orders, and felt no tremors of "buck fever." Aiming steadily, he pulled the trigger — the animal bounded into the

air, and fell, and at the same moment a rustling was heard in the brush at the left, which they supposed indicated the presence there of another deer; but paying no attention to it all three jumped up, and the two boys ran down toward the game, while Cora halted in the moonlit path.

Carter had plunged into the bushes and Zeph was on the point of following him, when he was suddenly arrested by a peculiar sharp yelp from Bimber — a yelp of unmistakable terror and defiance. Turning quickly, his heart seemed to stop beating, and every nerve to become paralyzed with horror. Cora — his special friend and champion, *Cora!* — was standing like a statue in the white glare of the moonlight, still as if frozen there, and was gazing fascinated with fear at a mountain-lion, whose lithe, tawny form, crouched along the ground for a deadly spring, was half seen in the shadows beyond. The light swish of its tail, lashing back and forth against the dewy weeds, could be heard above the low growling which showed its rage toward the terrier, who had discovered the great cat, and had diverted its attention at the very instant of its intended leap.

And now Bimber, every hair erect, nerving his foolish little heart to defend his mistress, was dashing out and back, yelping and barking, alternating between boldness and cowardice in the

face of that terrifying foe, afraid to advance, yet determined not to retreat.

All this came to Zeph in a flash. Carter was behind him, he did not know where, and useless anyway, for his gun was empty. The girl stood almost directly between him and the puma, so that he could see nothing more than the animal's head. His own shock was over now and his mind was clear and working swiftly. If he moved one side, he thought, a bush would come between them; if he rushed forward, the animal would surely spring upon both.

"Stand perfectly still, Cora," he called out steadily. "I must shoot close past your shoulder. Don't stir!"

The girl made no answer — perhaps she could not have spoken if she would. Her tongue refused to obey her. Her muscles were rigid, her limbs fixed, and in the face of those terrible eyes she never thought of danger from the bullet.

Zeph, too, saw those eyes, catching the moonlight and scintillating like gems just beyond his friend's shoulder, as the puma, as if to remeasure the distance, partly rose upon its feet, and the dog doubled its clamor; and with a thought's prayer to heaven he glanced along the line of light upon his barrel's ridge into their burning depths and pressed the trigger.

A mighty roar burst out of the darkness, the panther reared upright, fell over, and then crashed away through the bushes, while Cora sank to her knees and pitched forward unconscious.

As hurriedly as possible Zeph and Carter reloaded their rifles,—then a work of time, for breech-loaders and the quick shoving in of fresh cartridges were yet known only to a favored few. This necessary precaution taken, to raise the girl and restore her to consciousness was the work of only a few moments, and then all went home to tell the story of how Bimber and Zeph together had saved the girl's life, and how Carter had bagged his first deer.

"Old man," cried Andy, as he wrung Zeph's hand and threw his arm affectionately about his shoulder, "it was the *nerviest* thing I ever heard of. You have the making of a hero in you!"

"He *is* a hero," declared Annie, enthusiastically, "and here's another!" and then she snatched up Bimber and hugged that bewildered doggie till he almost bit her in his struggle to get away.

The morning after this terrible adventure was spent in gathering the results of the night's work. The deer was untouched, though a pair of coyotes, seen sneaking away on the opposite side of the river, showed what might have happened had not

the boys been on hand early. Dividing the carcass into halves, it was carried to camp, and then Zeph and Andy, taking dogs and rifles, started upon the trail of the panther, in spite of the protests of the girls.

Nig's nose was of the keenest, and when she came to where the animal had been shot, she did not need a second whiff to tell her its name and assure her that she desired no further acquaintance. Dropping her ears and tail, she promptly trotted off toward camp, paying no attention whatever to the command of her master to return. She made it understood that she was a *bird-dog* and wanted nothing to do with cats, big or little.

Bimber, on the other hand, was eager for the fray. Here was his old enemy, and he wanted to get at him. With a whine of joy he took up the trail and dashed through the bushes faster than the young men could follow. The signs of the panther's hasty passage, and here and there blood on the leaves, showed it had been badly wounded. The trail quickly led out of the thickets along the stream, and into the open, where the dog's nose led them straight on toward the rocks near the mouth of the stream, and there they found the puma, lying dead with a bullet-hole in its neck. They tied its feet together and slung it to a pole and carried it to camp in

triumph; and the Indian, who had been told the story, pushed aside the brush of his hut to peer out, and his eyes brightened as the boys with their burden appeared.

“Ah,” he said, “he is the father of all the game, and the Great Panther is king of the hunter-gods.”

Zeph, as has been said, had brought with him materials for preserving hides, of which he had expected, when he started West, to obtain a great many more than, so far, he had even seen. Under his direction the skin was carefully removed, and the day was spent mainly in properly preparing it for preservation with the hair on, so that when they reached their journey's end—and no one would confess that this situation in which they now found themselves was anything more than a temporary delay—the hide might be tanned into a handsome rug.

As a matter of fact the plan was realized. And when, years afterward, Cora was Mrs. Zeph McAllister, and this tawny skin lay sprawling before the open fire in her drawing-room, no story of her adventurous girlhood was more eagerly listened to by her friends than that of how her husband had killed it; and of the brave little dog who had long since gone to that happy hunting-ground which somewhere surely awaits such bright and noble souls as his.



CHAPTER XXIV

DISCLOSES THE ANGER OF THE RAIN-GODS

THE swelling in the Indian's foot and leg gradually went down. By the fourth day he could sit up, and on the afternoon of the fifth was able to hobble out of the hut and sit in the sunshine, which never seemed too hot for him, though he wore no head-gear except a kind of crown of leaves, which gave him a quaint and picturesque appearance, but was of little practical service.

His clothes were wholly of buckskin, more in the shape of civilized garments (though the shirt was worn outside the leggings) than was the scanty attire of the Comanches and other wild Indians our emigrants had seen. He had one of

those finely woven, handsomely striped, red, blue, and white blankets made by the Navajo and Apache weavers from the wool of their own sheep, and carried a small willow bow and half a dozen arrows. These weapons were contained in a double case or quiver made of prairie-dog skins, ornamented and tasseled, and carried slung over his shoulder, leaving his hands free. His waist was encircled, in place of a belt, by a horsehair rope, such as the Mexicans use as a lariat, or picket-rope, for their horses, and in this was stuck his knife and the fringed and beaded pouch before mentioned, containing a lot of small articles the uses of which the boys could not understand,—among the rest a tied bundle of queer sticks and several curious little images of clay and of wood, some of which resembled frogs and other aquatic animals, some the human figure, while others were like nothing they had ever seen. He had nothing else except a decanter-shaped, basket-work canteen, so closely woven and well daubed with pitch that it would hold water like a bottle.

In stature he was rather small, but spare and sinewy. His face was very dark; the features, though full of wrinkles, were fine and sharp; and instead of parting his hair in the middle and lengthening it out with strips of fur into two long plaits intended to hang down on each shoulder,

as other Indians they had seen were in the habit of doing, he wore it cut squarely off across the forehead like a schoolgirl's, and long behind his head, where usually it was rolled up into a knot, but sometimes hung free, confined by a fillet of buckskin around the forehead.

During all this time they had learned little or nothing about the man. No one, indeed, could talk with him except Andy, and he refused to do so until his patient was fairly well.

The evening of the day after Cora's thrilling adventure the old fellow sat by the fire and received his supper with the rest, smiling a "Gratias!" every time Annie, who had taken it upon herself to attend to him, — all fear or repugnance had long ago vanished from their minds, — offered him a portion of the food. Andy gave him, after the meal, a plug of tobacco; and he filled his pipe and revelled in it, his own tobacco being largely a mixture of coarse leaf, red-willow bark, dried barberry leaves, etc. As all gathered round the big fire, Andy thought the time had come to question their guest, and all the rest were on tiptoe to hear.

"Friend," Andy began, "we are very glad to find that you are getting well and can sit with us by the fire. We will gladly tell you about ourselves, and why we are here, but first we should

like to know something about you. Tell us your name and tribe."

The old fellow smoked silently for a moment, then answered:—

"I am a Moki from the pueblo of Whalpi, many days' journey in that direction," pointing southwest. "I am the oldest and most learned Priest of the Fire in my village, and it would be unlucky for me to say my name aloud. My wife will tell it to you if you will honor my poor pueblo by coming to visit it. All that is there shall be yours. I know that is what the white men [he meant Mexican Spaniards] always say, out of mere politeness, but I mean it exactly—all I have may be yours, for you have saved my life."

"Tell him we'll go right off," Annie exclaimed, when his words had been translated, "if he will show us the way."

The Indian smiled when Andy had repeated this to him in Spanish, but only said "Bueno," in a hearty way.

Then Andy put the next and most natural of questions:—

"How did you get here, and do you know a way down from the mesa?"

"I came by the valley in the west and across the neck of land which is now gone," he an-

swered. "I had walked many days, and often at night, creeping through the canyons over there," pointing to the southwest, "and hiding away from the Navajos, who are the enemies of the Mokis. They steal our sheep and goats, and carry off our young men and our maidens whenever they can surprise them in the fields. They are out raiding the country now; but they dare not fight our men in the open," cried the old warrior, his form straightening and his eyes flashing like a hawk's. "They are cowards! Their hearts are as the hearts of women."

"Then why did you come so far among them alone?"

"Every year, in the beginning of this month," he answered solemnly, "I must visit this spring on the mesa, where my grandfathers lived many, many generations ago. You can see the foundations of their ancient town up there on the ridge, and the cliff-houses that the gods helped them to build. It is a *sacred* spring, and I, the head priest of my people, must come and say prayers and offer sacrifices to the spirits who dwell about the water. They are the gods to whom the Sun, the great Chief of gods, has given the rain; and if we did not honor and thank them, they would send no more water to fill our irrigating ditches or moisten our fields. Our crops of corn and

vegetables and our orchards of peaches and plums and melons would wither and we should starve."

The reader can imagine what a sensation this remarkable statement created in that camp-fire circle; and no wonder all found themselves glancing at the ledges, half visible in the moonlight, as though their eyes might surprise some of these divinities, that seemed so substantial and matter-of-fact to their visitor, even then standing about the old houses and looking down at the strange invaders of their consecrated valley.

"I was stepping down the rocks to the sacred spring," the old man went on, after smoking thoughtfully a few minutes, "in order that I might tell the gods of these things, and throw into the water my offerings of tobacco and of the fruit of our fields, and pray to them to send us good rains again next year. Also, I was going to explain to them how you came here through accident and misfortune, and would do no harm."

"Why, how did you know that?"

"I saw you come on the night of the storm, and have been watching you to see what kind of young people you were. I intended to tell you on the day after the storm where your horses were, but the señoritas were so frightened I did not try it again. As I was saying, I was stepping

down to the spring when the snake struck me. It is a sign — I do not fear the rattlesnake. He knows me and will not bite me if I do not hurt him; and this wound shows me that the gods are angry with the Mokis.”

He paused, looking sober and troubled. These sun-gods and rain-gods were very real to his simple faith. After a little time, Andy, who had translated this curious story to the others, reminded their guest of what all were so anxious to know by asking him again:—

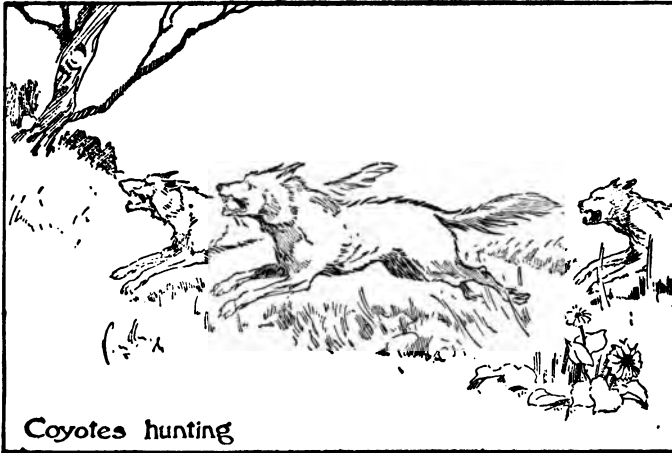
“Can you tell us the way to get down to the valley?”

The curious eyes of all the group were bent upon him with intense interest, and he evidently understood their feelings, for he cast down his eyes, and his voice took a low tone as he slowly answered, shaking his head:—

“There is no longer *any* way. The gods have cut in two the path behind me. I must remain here until I die; and after I am gone my people can make no more suitable sacrifices, for no one but me knows where this home of the rain-gods is, and now they will not let me go back to instruct my son in the secret. No more rain will fall, and the nation will perish.”

And then the old man began to rock his body to and fro, and to croon, in his own language, a

strange chant which needed no words to express the despair of a hopeless heart, sorrowing, not for himself, but for his people deserted by their heavenly benefactors. He had evidently forgotten all about the troubles of his young listeners ; and they were to be baffled and vexed many times afterward by this absent-minded indifference of the old priest, which did not arise from selfishness, but came from a lifetime of brooding.



CHAPTER XXV

SURVEYS THE BORDERS OF THE MESA CAREFULLY

THE words of old Whalpi, as they had come to call the venerable Moki since he had objected to telling his name, so dramatically and earnestly uttered, could not fail to impress deeply all who had listened. To judge by their faces, Annie and Carter gave up all hope on the spot, and were already preparing their minds for a slow death. Zeph, on the contrary, plainly announced it to be his opinion that the "head priest" was a superstitious old humbug, and his croaking was all bosh.

This courageous view of the matter was refreshing, and Cora supported it with a bold "I think so, too."

“If I don’t find a road out of this here scrape inside of a week, I’ll eat my red head,” Zeph continued resolutely, and again Cora backed him up, — “If you don’t, I will,” leaving it to the sense of the rest to decide whether she meant she would eat his red head or find a way out.

At any rate, faltering hearts were braced, and the outcome of the talk about the fire after the Indian had retired was a resolution to get out of their predicament if wit and activity could do it, and to lose no time about it.

Accordingly, early next morning, an expedition started out to begin a minute examination of the cliffs. It consisted of Zeph, Annie, and Carter, Andy staying in camp with Cora. “To-morrow,” said old Whalpi, when he was informed of the purpose of the movement, and perhaps catching the spirit of the cheerful bustle, “to-morrow I shall be well, and will go and look with you, for it may be the gods are trying me, and will give me one more chance.”

“I allow *my* gods won’t help *me* until I help myself,” Zeph declared, “so come on, you fellows.”

They chose the western side of the mesa because this was the least known, certain parts of it having scarcely been seen; and began back at the ridge where they had camped under the shelter of the stone ledges showing fire marks.

The edge of the mesa there was gashed by ravines and broken places, sometimes several hundred yards deep, forming great V-shaped alcoves in the upper layers of the line of cliffs.

Between these ravines were headlands, out upon which they could walk, until they could gaze down into the alcoves and survey the walls, here five or six hundred feet in height. The bottom third of this height, however, was hidden by a sloping heap or *talus* of the fragments continually dropping from the face of the cliffs.

The rocks were all of the same kind — cream-colored and red sandstones lying in almost level strata, or layers, like courses of gigantic masonry. Some of the layers were slightly harder than others, and these, not wearing away as fast as the adjoining strata, formed ledges where cedars and various small trees, planted by the wind or birds, grew in a gnarled and precarious fashion.

“It’s dead sure nobody could climb down here,” was Zeph’s opinion, as they stood on the first headland, and saw the overhanging masses of crag dropping like regular walls on both sides.

They gathered the juicy, lemon-flavored fruit of the prickly pear as they went along, and found great quantities of the sweetish service-berry and some wild gooseberries and cherries, so that when they came to take luncheon on the tip of the third



“Headlands, out upon which they could walk.”

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promontory, which overlooked a magnificent panorama of richly colored and fantastically shaped crags and pinnacles opposite, with the far-away snowy mountains behind them, they had a most refreshing half hour, excepting for the lack of cool water. So far, however, no progress at all had been made toward their object, although two miles or more of the shore of their "island in the air," as Annie called it, had been surveyed.

"How far do you suppose it is around the edge of the mesa?" Zeph was asked.

"Well, that is a hard one, as the man said when he bit on the wooden nutmeg. I reckon, not counting all the ins and outs of these capes and bays, that it must be more'n twenty-five miles; but we've looked over the biggest half of it—and the more I see of it, the less I like it."

After half an hour's halt they trudged on again through the hot sun,—very thirsty, for they had with them only two bottles of water, and this had grown sickishly warm. A coyote or two were seen, and once a deer and her fawn were disturbed in a hollow. Presently the party came to the head of a ravine of unusual length, which sloped at the top in a way that seemed encouraging; and this they decided to try to descend.

At first they could scramble down quite easily,

but after going a couple of hundred feet they found themselves on the brink of a steep declivity, where they had to be extremely cautious to escape slipping over the edge. By forming a chain of hands, Zeph holding firmly by a bush, Carter was let down to a lower ledge, and was able to walk along it a considerable distance, but soon came back to report that it ended in an impassable wall. So they pulled him up again and all climbed back to the surface.

It was now too late to undertake the long jaunt out upon the next headland; and tired, hungry, and thirsty, the trio took up their march for camp, a couple of miles away. Thus ended in failure the first search for a means of descent from their lofty prison.

The following day two parties resumed the search where it had been left off, but when all had returned about sunset, none had had any distinct success with which to cheer the other. Each party had covered perhaps two miles by the day's work, and both had crept down steep breaks in the cliffs, and had crawled along ticklish ledges, but these always came to an impassable end.

On one of the ledges of the eastern wall Andy had found several stone houses similar to those in the rocks near the mouth of the river, and in one of them had discovered a whole example of a very

curious earthen pot, the peculiar style of which was the same as marked hundreds of the fragments lying about all the ruins.

That evening Whalpi showed them how this kind of pot was made, by coiling a rope of wet clay into the form of a pot or pitcher or whatever was to be made, and pinching the coils together; but he said no such pottery was fashioned nowadays. He talked a great deal about his people, who, he said, used to dwell in all these canyons and on these mesas at a time long ago when rain fell in abundance and there was plenty of water in the rivers and in the irrigating ditches, and all the land was green and fruitful. He told them that these ancient villagers once inhabited great community houses or "pueblos," constructed of stone or of sun-dried bricks, many stories in height, and similar to those the travellers had seen in the valley of the Rio Grande north of Santa Fé.

- These great tenements stood down in the bottom of the valleys beside the rivers, and were surrounded by large plantations. After a long time, according to his tale, "Los Navajos" and "Los Utahs," the rough-riding mountain Indians, began to raid these villages and farms, and then the people built the houses in the cliffs and caves, and on the tops of almost inaccessible rocks and mesas, as storehouses and places of refuge against

the time of these raids; but these cliff-houses were always placed on that side of the canyon facing the rising of the sun, which was the supreme object of worship.

The adventures of the third day were much the same, and equally disappointing. That night the boys laid in wait for deer, but got none, and the camp went hungry.

"When next we kill a deer or antelope," Whalpi advised them, "we must dry the flesh, Indian-fashion, so that it will keep a long time. I will teach you how."

The next day, accordingly, was devoted to a hunt, Zeph and Whalpi riding away early and not coming back till nearly sundown, but it had not taken all this time to find and shoot the deer they brought with them. They had been doing something else much of the time; and although the Indian was as calm as usual, the others saw at a glance that the white lad was brimful of news, and questions were hurled at him before he had jumped off his horse.

"We rode straight down to the rocky Butte," said Zeph, "and found at its base a valley something like this, with a quiet little pond in the middle, very likely fed by our stream through some underground channel. Whalpi had never seen it before, yet there are ancient and extensive

ruins there; and on top of the Butte is a tall, round structure which Whalpi says was a watch-tower."

"Didn't you go beyond the Butte?" Cora asked, after he had given a lot more facts about the place.

"Yes, we rode on over to the brink of the cliffs about a quarter of a mile eastward, and struck a great ravine leading downward from a long distance back. We hadn't time to go very far down it, but Whalpi and I both believe that it will open a way for us to get down to the valley."

"We must certainly look into it to-morrow," said Andy; and the girls fairly danced as they ran away to prepare for a supper of fresh venison.



CHAPTER XXVI

BRINGS "LOS NAVAJOS" INTO VIEW, AND DIS-
COURSES OF THEM

TOWARD noon on the day following the hunt and the encouraging news, the whole party was seated upon the tip of a headland at the south-eastern and very loftiest corner of the mesa, overlooking a broad valley, where a river could be traced by lines of trees and thickets of willow which grew along its banks, and by bright glints of sunshine reflected here and there from its current. They had driven over in the ambulance, quite as much to exercise the mules, and keep them in working habits, as to save the four-mile tramp. The animals had rested and thriven

amazingly on the valley grass, and it was an exciting ride, in spite of Zeph's skilful driving; and Whalpi, who had never before been in a real wagon, plainly showed his doubts about their safety, much to the amusement of his hosts.

“Until I got him behind those mules,” Zeph said, when they were laughing about it afterward, “I thought he was a real ‘wooden Injun,’ and was planning to take him out to the Coast and sell him to a cigar-store man.”

All eyes were now concentrated upon two or three lines of color curling upward among the trees — plainly smoke from fires.

“Maybe it's papa!” exclaimed Annie, rapturously. “Oh, what if mamma should be there!”

“'Fraid not,” said Zeph. “Don't see no wagon, though there's something like a tent.”

“And horses,” added Cora, whose eyes were sharp.

“You're right, sis,” Andy agreed. “Yet father might have gone back somewhere, and, leaving the schooner, have organized an expedition on horse-back to look us up; but if that's so, the expedition is a big one, for I can count a pile o' horses.”

“Do you suppose he would think of looking up here?” Cora asked anxiously.

“Maybe some of the old mountain men in the Rio Grande villages have given him a hint,” Zeph

suggested; "but nobody seems to be doing anything that looks like it."

"Couldn't we make a smoke and attract their attention?" exclaimed Annie.

"Why, of course we could—bright idea!" said Zeph, jumping up and beginning to gather dried grasses and greasewood twigs. "This stuff will make a big fire, and if they see it and come over this way, we can make ourselves understood somehow."

"We might write a note and throw it down tied to a stone," was Cora's idea.

"Let's ask the Indian," said Annie. "His eyes are keener than ours and he knows the country;" and she called out at once to Whalpi, who was lying on the grass at a distance nibbling at a chunk of dried deer-flesh.

The old medicine man came at once in answer to the hail; but when his gaze followed Annie's pointing finger, and discovered what she saw, the bent and indolent loungee changed like magic into the savage tribesman and warrior. He straightened to his full height, seemed to cast off, as he might a mask, ten years of his age, and his countenance hardened into an expression of hatred and wrath.

"Los Navajos!" hissed through his teeth.

Then he sat down and studied the scene; but

it was long before Annie, at least, got over the fearsome impression this exhibition of tribal ferocity made upon her.

“They are a long way off,” he announced at length, “and I cannot count their lodges among the bushes, but there must be many, for they have a large band of horses. It is a raiding party, and you must not make a smoke nor show yourselves. Lie down or keep back from the edge so they will not see you. They have eyes like that black vulture up there in the sky, and like him they are looking for prey.”

Thus they remained for some time watching and talking about the distant camp of these dreaded warriors of the desert—the terror not only of the Pueblo-Indians, but of all the ranchmen on that frontier. Were they likely to stay in the valley so long as to interfere with the escape of the party, provided a place for descent could be found here? and might not the Navajos themselves know of the trail, if one existed, and come wandering up here? To the latter alarming query Whalpi answered:—

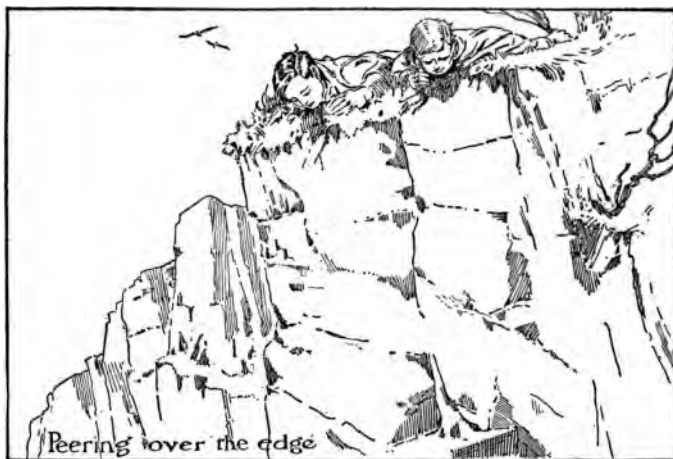
“No. There is nothing to tempt them to come here as long as they do not know about us. They would be afraid to come up here, anyway, for they think this mesa is bewitched,—so our young braves tell me. I suppose that is a tradition of

the old times when our fathers lived here, and *their* fathers felt the wrath of the men and the gods who dwelt about the sacred spring."

But further questioning was put an end to by Andy's reminder that this panicky gossip was wasting precious time.

"You girls'd better stay here and keep your 'bright eyes' on the redskins while we fellows explore the ravine. If we find anything worth looking at, we'll let you know. Come on, boys! *Viene usted conmigo, Whalpi?*"

"*Si, señor.*"



CHAPTER XXVII

DESCRIBES A NOVEL TREE-CLIMBING

LEAVING the girls as watchers, Whalpi and the three lads hastened away upon their last hopeful exploration, carrying with them a couple of lariats which could be knotted into a rope some thirty feet long.

They found no great difficulty in scrambling down the trough of the ravine, meeting with no adventure except the disturbance of a fox, which carried its brush into a convenient cranny in short order. The dogs were after him in an instant, and Carter after the dogs. Fortunately Nig got to the hole first, and found it too big for her; but her fooling about it stopped the way long enough

for the boy to catch up and grab Bimber by the tail just as that plucky but indiscreet terrier was forcing his way in. It was a mad little dog he dragged out, but Carter held him until he could kick a stone into the mouth of the fox's den. Then he let the dog go, and Bimber stayed there for an hour scratching and fuming in a vain attempt to get at his enemy.

Meanwhile the others had stopped while Whalpi scraped away from a rock a lot of lichens of a certain kind which he had found, and which he carefully stowed away in his wallet. They asked him what it was good for—was it good to eat?

“No, it is for paint; when it is dry and powdered, and then mixed with warm sheep-fat, it makes a fine yellow paint which our young men prize very highly for putting on their faces. I used to like it myself, when I was young and wanted to make a show,” the old man chuckled. “But the Apaches,” he went on, “say it gives more than prettiness to a man. An Apache always carries a little of this yellow paint with him, and now and then puts it on his face as a charm. One of their old men told me that if he should paint a cross-mark with it on his feet, he could go about, and nobody could see him. That would be a good thing in war, or when you go

stealing horses. Maybe it's true with the Apaches, but I guess it wouldn't do for a Moki."

Andy took a specimen of this lichen and found out, a year or so afterward, that it was called by botanists *Evernia vulpina*.

Presently the dip of the ravine began to grow decidedly steeper, but cedars and mesquits grew abundantly. Holding by these, they were able to proceed slowly but safely a good bit farther, and finally reached a platform of smooth, naked rock on the face of the cliff, beyond which no descent seemed to be possible — which was most disheartening. Peering over the edge, however, they could see below it a series of ledges which looked climbable if they could be reached.

"How far down are they?" Carter asked.

"Fifty or sixty feet, I should say."

"Couldn't we let ourselves down by a rope?"

"I suppose so if we had one, but we haven't; and, besides that, we are not sure we could go any farther."

Meanwhile old Whalpi and Zeph had been scouting right and left, and a hail from the latter now came echoing up the rocks. Creeping through the bushes, they finally found their companion sitting on the edge of a ledge with his feet dangling down a crevice, out of which peeped the top of a pine tree.

"Look here!" he said. "This yellow pine has grown from that ledge down there right up into this break. What's to hinder our getting into the top of it and climbing down to its roots?"

"I never heard of anybody beginning at the top to climb a tree," Andy laughed, "but I reckon it can be done."

"I'm going to try it, anyhow;" and seizing the pliant top of the pine, Zeph pulled it toward him, placed his foot in a crotch, and swung off. He was soon lost to sight, but could be heard scrambling down the trunk.

"The girls'll have a sweet time going down *that* ladder," Carter chuckled.

Soon Zeph was heard singing out.

"Hello, yourself!" they responded.

"Bring down the rope. The trunk's too big to shin, and it's too far to jump."

Andy started, but Carter insisted that *he* wanted to do this acrobatic errand. So his brother helped him get into the waving upper branches, and a few moments later both lads reported themselves safe on the rocks below, which, they shouted, formed a broad and level shelf. Lying down, with their faces over the edge of their own ledge, Andy and the Indian could see those below very well.

"Hurry up," they called out. "We can't stay

here long if we expect to get back to camp to-night."

Thus admonished, the two ran about some, and soon returned to say that they felt sure they could get down to a certain long shelf which seemed pretty near the bottom of the cliffs, but that it was impossible to tell what lay beyond it.

"Looks as if that was the jumpin'-off place," Zeph added.

"Well, come back now. We must get out of this."

"All right," they answered, and disappeared toward the tree, where they had an immense amount of trouble in hauling themselves up to the lower branches of the pine again, even with the help of the rope which had been left dangling from the lowest limbs. It was, therefore, a weary company that finally joined the girls, — themselves by no means in jolly mood. As for the Indian, he told them he meant to spend the night at the old pueblo-ruins on the Butte, which he wanted to look at again.

When Zeph heard this, he declared that he would like to do the same thing if they would give him a blanket and something to eat. The Indian had been too proud or too indifferent to mention this, but he grinned and grunted a "Gratias!" when the provisions were handed out.

“Let’s hitch up in a hurry,” said Andy, “and we will drive you ’round there on our way home, and then call for you to-morrow morning, for I feel sure we can find some way down from that shelf if we hunt hard enough.”

So the two exiles were left by the little pond to pass the night together, while the others drove homeward.

Although the mountain-tops northward were still rosy, and the yellow sunset light still fell like a sheen of gold upon the hills westward and upon the mesa itself, down in the river-valley dusk was already settling, and a dozen points of brightness were sparkling where the red raiders had kindled their camp-fires among the willows, and were gambling with marked sticks or repeating to one another stories of forays past or plans for atrocities to come.

“Wouldn’t it be terrible, Andy,” said Annie, in a low tone, as she sat beside him on the driver’s seat, “if papa and mamma should come into that valley, and run right into that band of Navajos!”



CHAPTER XXVIII

SHOWS HOW THE ANCIENT CLIFF-DWELLERS HELPED
MODERN ONES

ZEPH was particularly glad to see the Mannings next morning when they returned, taking him the best breakfast they could prepare; and even old Whalpi, who appreciated highly at all times the good things he was given to eat, was by no means too dignified or stolid to express his satisfaction, especially to Annie.

When one has been used to sleeping in a bed, — even one no better than spruce boughs and horse-blankets, — and having regular and plentiful meals, to lie all night upon the bare ground, and then wait a couple of hours after rising in the crisp,

blood-stirring air of the Rocky Mountains, seem much greater hardships than they come to be considered after some practice.

“I enjoyed it, though,” Zeph asserted stoutly. “I know precious little of the Spanish lingo, but I’ve got the hang of the sign-language pretty well, and the old man and I did a heap o’ talking with our fingers. This morning, early, we wandered about these ruins by the rocks. Whalpi claims that there was once an immensely big house here, built ’round three sides of a square, and holding hundreds of rooms, or sets of rooms, in each of which a family lived. It was a *pueblo*, you know. In the centre was a courtyard protected on the fourth side by a wall of stone and ’dobe, with sentinels always at the gate, and up in the watch-tower on the Butte. The old medicine man took a stick and drew for me on the ground a right good picture of how the place used to look.”

The lad was eating all this time and talking between mouthfuls.

“As I said, he claims that there was once a big house here, built ’round three sides of a square. He says the outside was just a dead wall without any doors and only a few, if any, windows, and this wall reached, of course, clear to the top of the block. But inside the second

story was not so wide as the first story, and so on until the fifth was only the width of one house — mebbe twenty feet. In the centre of the pueblo was a courtyard, protected on the open side by a wall, where the various families had small granaries and conical ovens of 'dobe, and put up wooden stagings to hold their property and food out of reach of thieving dogs and children.

“According to Whalpi, the rooms on the ground floor had no outside doors at all, but the people used to climb up to the roof from the courtyard by a ladder and then go down by another into their rooms through a scuttle. This first roof was the front porch of the next tier of houses, and the folks that lived at the top of the pueblo had to climb four sets of ladders to reach home.”

“Regular tenement-house,” Cora interrupted.

“Just the same; and I don’ know’s it’s much worse to go up ladders outside than up stairs inside. Mebbe those chaps weren’t so far behind as we think. And Whalpi discovered a mighty queer place—an underground meeting-house. He nosed round in all sorts of holes and corners, like Bimber after a chipmunk, before he found it. I couldn’t get any idea of what he was after till he found it, and then we had to do a lot of clearing to get at it. Come on, and I’ll show it to you,

now that I have disposed of this grub,—and thank you, ma'am!" He smiled up at Cora.

Turning to old Whalpi, who had been eating without paying much attention to the talk he could not understand, Zeph pointed to himself and the others, touched his eyes with two fingers, and pointed toward the ruins, at the same time pronouncing the word *estufa*.

The Indian nodded, and a moment later rose and led the way to a barren terrace at the foot of the Butte, which was studded with half-overturnd walls, grass-grown heaps of refuse, and innumerable fragments of decorated pottery; and here he pointed out, in the middle of the ancient courtyard, a squarish hole surrounded by a ruined curb.

Peering down this hatchway, all were able to see that this subterranean chamber widened out like a big cistern, and that its floor was not very far below. When, therefore, Cora suggested that it would be interesting to explore it, Zeph and Carter searched about until they found a dead cedar which, after some trimming, would serve as a ladder, and then all went down.

The place proved to be a dry and dusty chamber, partly hollowed out of the solid sandstone, and partly walled up (above the rock) with blocks of stone, well faced, neatly cemented together, and

covered for some ten feet above the floor with a dado, or wainscoting, of a kind of hard smooth plaster. The roof was of logs, covered with poles and earth, and supported on a few posts.

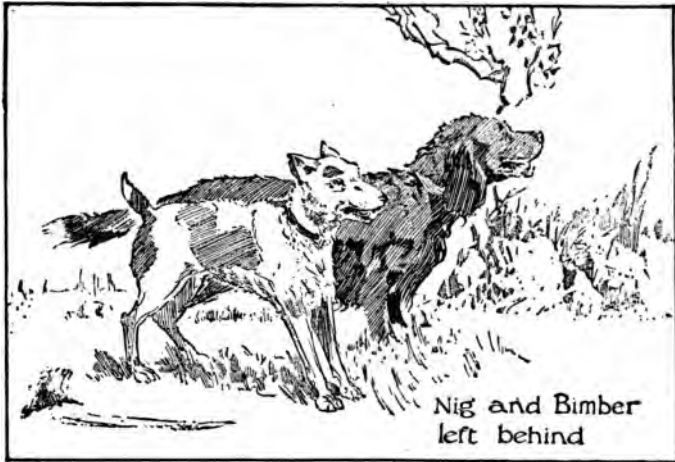
So much was revealed by the daylight which streamed down through the hatchway; but when Andy struck a match, all were astonished to see that the walls were covered with painted figures. Everybody wanted to see more of them, so the younger boys went out and gathered armfuls of dry cedar-branches and so forth, and built a bright fire. Then it was seen that all four sides were decorated with curious bars, circles, zigzags, and spirals, together with colored figures, some unmistakably intended for men, others for animals, and many more that meant nothing at all to the boys.

To the old Indian, however, they seemed to signify a great deal, and he became at once vastly excited, as he explained to Andy that these were not idle scribblings, nor simply barbaric decorations, but were pictured records made by the wise councillors of the ancient community, so long departed, who used to meet in this underground house, or *kiva*, as he called it (pronouncing it *kee-va*), where the sacred fire was kept perpetually burning by the Priests of the Sun. It was for this reason that the early Spaniards gave to chambers

like this, which they found in many of the pueblos they visited, the name *estufa*, or stove-room. This chamber, he said, also served the town as council-hall, conference-room, when a war or other public matter was under discussion, and between times as a sort of club-room or general lounging-place.

The hieroglyphics were so old-fashioned, he added, that he did not understand them at first glance; but he could not think of leaving the place until he had endeavored to decipher them, since they might contain information of life-or-death value to his nation and himself.

“Go on, my friends,” he commanded. “Search for the home-trail. I will stay and try to read these, and afterward I may follow you. The gods must have some great message to reveal to my people, since I have been brought so wonderfully, now in my old age, to learn of this forgotten pueblo and these paintings. I will get more light and study them.”



CHAPTER XXIX

TELLS HOW BIMBER FOUND A WAY

LEAVING the priestly antiquary absorbed in his task, the boys and girls drove back to the ravine, and unhitching and hobbling the mules so that they would not stray too far — though there was little danger of that — the party hurried down to where they had quit exploration on the preceding day. Of course Bimber and Nig came along; and although they stopped to growl and scratch about the fox's den, they caught up with the party by the time they had reached the great ledge where the pine tree was to be taken as the next step. Here the boys proposed to leave the girls. In fact, they had objected to their sisters

coming with them at all, but quite without avail; and now again they were obliged to cut away branches and help the young ladies down that tree, Cora declaring, and Annie standing by her determinedly, that they would go down by themselves if the boys left them behind.

“We are tired of staying alone in spooky places,” they said.

Down they all scrambled, therefore, and the girls managed it with less help than their brothers expected — all, that is, except the dogs. The light and agile little terrier might perhaps have been handed down the tree from one to the other, but to have got the heavy setter down would have been too troublesome and risky a task, since there was no real necessity of it; and to have taken them up again would have been all but impossible.

But how those dogs did rage and plead when they found themselves abandoned! Nig’s solemn black head and Bimber’s bright little face were to be seen, close together, peering over the brink, each filled with anxiety and alarm and grief. When they saw they were noticed, they began to talk. They barked and howled and whined and sang. One minute they were crying with rage and terror, telling their masters and mistresses what a shame such treatment was, and the next

were pleading and whining with affectionate humility. They asked forgiveness for all the times they had been cross or disobedient or lazy, and begged each and all to forget it and take them along. They howled their grief in an agony of repentance, and vowed real reformation if only the dreadful punishment might be remitted and they need not stay behind in this dreadful place. Bimber swore by all his doggish saints that he would jump down, and Cora was in terror lest he really would; and her stern commands to him only increased his agony and noise.

“If only we could make him understand that it is only for a little while — that pretty soon we shall come back!”

She stayed and watched him while the others went on, until at last he and Nig both gave up their struggle and disappeared. Then the girl hastened after her companions.

Once on this lower ledge the party had little difficulty in scrambling by devious zigzaggings and slidings down to other projecting strata below, until at last they found themselves within perhaps a hundred feet of the top of the slope, or talus, as geologists term it, at the bottom of the cliff. This talus was the slope of broken stone and earth, thinly overgrown with sage-brush and cactus, which had been formed at their base by the frag-

ments which day by day fell from the crags. Such a deposit is found everywhere that cliffs exist.

What causes this incessant rain of falling stones, which in the course of time will build up a sloping bank as high as the front of the cliff itself, and so destroy the cliff-face altogether, and turn a scarp-fronted table-land into a flat-topped hill with sides sloping as steeply as the loose material will lie, until they are further changed by the action of running water? The answer is ready.

In cold regions, as in northern latitudes or near the summits of lofty mountains, frost is the main agent. Water gets behind loose flakes, or sinks into cracks and crevices. Then comes a freeze, the water turns to ice, and in doing so expands, as everybody knows, and bursts off the small pieces (sometimes very large ones), or at least strains their fastening so that after a while a break occurs. Of course this process goes on much more rapidly where the rocks are porous, loose, and brittle than among the solid, tough granites and trachytes of which many of the Rocky Mountains are composed.

In the case of these mesas, composed of level beds of sandstone, they are too far south to be much exposed to frost, and the decay is slow, and is accomplished mainly by the alternate expan-

sion and contraction of the rocks in the face of the ledges. These swell under the fierce heat of the long summer days, and then shrink sharply in the chill of the cold dry nights. This gives a daily repeated wrench to all their particles near the surface, and finally they break apart along some line of weakness and fall, or simply crumble and blow away as dust.

Another thing helps. The strong winds which blow almost incessantly in that country, as is always the case where plains abut upon high mountains, carry with them much fine, sharp sand, and so act as rasps, incessantly filing down the rocks against which they blow, and sweeping away every loosened particle. Hence the noticeable fact that all exposed points and ledges are rounded. This continuous sand-blast of course works more rapidly on the soft strata in the face of a cliff than on the harder layers, and so steadily cuts away the support underneath a hard stratum, until from time to time its weight causes great pieces of overhanging shelf to break off and tumble down.

In these ways the cliffs are retreating day by day, and the talus-slopes in front of them grow higher and thicker.

This last ledge to which the party had now come was one of the hard, overhanging strata

just spoken of, which formed a projecting shelf, as broad as a city street in some places, and roofed over like a gallery by other rocks, but in other places narrow and unsheltered. At intervals along it the explorers came upon hewn stones, broken pottery, hearths where fires had been built, and rude walls erected in the form of a parapet along the brink, as if to keep the inhabitants from falling off. Zeph was right when he remarked that it would be a poor place to raise a family of children, and grinned when Annie agreed, but added that it would be a good place to drop them.

At the farther end of the shelf, to their right, or eastward, stood a long row of stone houses, many in good repair, beyond which the ledge curved outward and ended in a sheer buttress of rock, where not even a goat could find a foothold, — much less pass on around to whatever lay beyond. They could go no farther.

Overcome with disappointment, heat, and weariness, all sat down and gazed silently out into the thin, blue air and down through it to the yellow valley upon which they seemed likely never to set foot.

“To think of all this work for nothing!” Andy exclaimed.

“And of that dreadful climb back to the top,”

sighed Annie, to whom indeed it would be a fearful task.

It was on the tip of Carter's tongue to say that it was her own fault, — she needn't have come; but instead he leaned over and laid his face on his sister's knee and let her stroke his hair. He was very tired, and very discouraged, and, after all, he was only a little boy.

Every one wanted to rest, and no one had the heart to propose a move; and so they sat quietly, each thinking his own thoughts for many minutes. But they could not wait there forever; and Cora was just summoning resolution enough to get upon her feet and say "Come!" when she was nearly knocked over by a small black and white animal, and Bimber was devouring her face with kisses and whimpering with delight!

And Nig was there, too.

"How in the world did the dogs get here? (There, Bim, be still — you've kissed me enough, doggie. I'll *never* leave you so again!) Is it possible they *jumped*?"

"Surely not," said Andy. "Neither is the least hurt."

"I don't believe they came down that tree," exclaimed Annie, with a large sense of her own troubles.

“They must have found some pathway down that we missed,” declared Zeph. “Come on, Cora, let’s see if Bimber won’t show us how he did it.”

Zeph and Cora ran back along the ledge, Bimber leaping about their legs as if wild with joy. When they got to the place where they had slid down from the ledges above, he paid no attention to it, but rushed ahead through some bushes and rocks that concealed the narrow extreme western end of the ledge, and disappeared. In a moment he darted back, to see whether they were following, and then shot off again; and so he led them along to where he turned into what seemed a shallow rift, up which he darted out of sight.

“*That’s* the way!” cried Zeph, and ran back to call the others. “The question is,” he explained, as he brought them up, “whether we can go where the dogs did.”

“Can’t tell till we try,” said Andy, and squeezed into the entrance of the rift, which had been partly choked by a large stone falling from above. This passed, the party found themselves inside a lofty, irregular crevice, from six to ten feet wide, with a sloping floor leading steeply upward, which they climbed in Indian file. Sometimes it was rough and difficult, but generally as easy to travel as any steep and badly made stairway would be. Indeed, they soon began to understand that this really

was a stairway where steps had been hewn in the floor of a natural crack in the rock — probably the path of some long extinct watercourse, which had sawed it out. Thus had been formed an easy and well-hidden means of passage between the little village or military outpost on the curving ledge and the great town on top of the mesa.

Its upper opening, letting them out upon the ledge at the foot of the ravine above the top of the pine, had been so cluttered up with rocks and screened by bushes and grass that no one had suspected the possibility of a passageway; but the eager dogs, nosing about in their determination to find their masters, had crawled through. Here it was needful to work awhile at putting aside the obstructions before the climbers could creep out; but a thoroughfare was soon cleared, and the remainder of the road up the ravine was familiar and easy.

Thus, scarcely an hour from the time of Bimber's joyful leap into Cora's discouraged arms, all stood once more upon the surface, and the feat had been far from "fearful," although everybody was out of breath and extremely tired.

"I don't believe my feet ever will get rested," Annie groaned as she tumbled rather than lay down on the grass. "And look at my shoes. They won't last another week at this rate; and I

shall have to go barefooted, or make a pair of moccasins. If I had had to climb that awful tree, I guess it would have torn them off my feet."

Hitching up the mules, which, thinking it about time, had gathered near the ambulance expectantly, they drove away in search of old Whalpi, curious to learn the result of his mysterious studies, and eager to let him know their discovery. They found the old fellow too absorbed in his translation of the antique wall-paintings to pay much attention to what they had to say; and although, after much urging, he consented to return to camp with his young friends, he was so preoccupied and moody that they knew he must have been profoundly impressed by what he had been studying.

Andy questioned him, but could get only vague replies, to the effect that he had learned little yet, for the style of the picture-writings was so old-fashioned that he could decipher them only slowly.

The next day was a Sunday, and all thought it best—except the fanatical old Indian, who went on with his researches—to devote it to much-needed rest and repairs.



CHAPTER XXX

TELLS HOW AN ENERGETIC YOUNG LADY ANSWERED
THE QUESTION "WHAT NEXT?"

"WHAT next?"

This was the momentous question that could no longer be avoided, and to which all sought an answer as they gathered in serious mood around the Sunday evening camp-fire.

"It is plain," Andy declared, in his habit of seeing first the dark side of every proposition, "that all of us have given up hope of escape through that big ravine — or, at any rate, from the ledge at the bottom of it. *We* can get down that far, of course, but how are we going to take the animals, or our things, and without them in this

wild country we might as well stay where we are."

"Don't count *me* in that list," Cora snapped out resolutely, and stirred the fire into a fresh blaze. "I don't call myself beaten *yet*. Perhaps we couldn't make a rope ladder long enough and strong enough to reach to the ground from that ledge; and maybe it is true that we wouldn't dare to go down it if we had one,—I'd hate to try it, for one,—but all the same I can't help thinking there's some way out at that very place."

"Why, you could see that it was just sheer precipice below those houses," she was reminded.

"I know it looks so. But remember how we missed the stairway till Bimber found it for us. I think if *I* had been with you boys last Friday, I would have poked my nose into every hole and corner till I was *sure* there wasn't a place a mouse could crawl through. It was just your ridiculous desire to have the fun of scrambling down that pine tree that blinded you to the proper way!"

There was a murmur of objection to this vigorous view of the boys' work, but Cora went on, striking a new tack, and punching the fire till the sparks flew high, as though she would enjoy punching somebody's head in the same way.

"More than that," said she; "why should any-

body make such a careful stairway unless it led clear down to the valley? You may be sure they wouldn't take all that trouble just for the sake of the few people living on the ledge. No sirree! There is, or used to be, some sort of a trail or staircase leading on down into the valley; and if Andy will go with me to-morrow, I'll do my best to prove it. Why, we haven't half explored that line of ruins! Will you go?"

"Go? Of course I will!"

"Just you and I. There's no use of the others making the climb."

"No. We'll go alone. If you fail, Cote, I won't say a word — wild horses shall not draw the confession from me; and if you succeed, I'll see that you get some of the credit and glory."

"Thank you — for nothing."

Cora was too deeply stirred to relish any levity.

The sun was pouring broadsides of heat and light upon the southward battlements of the mesa when on that next Monday morning Cora and her brother, having left their saddle-horses tied at the head of the ravine, crept out of the cool, shady rift, and stood again upon that lowermost, gallery-like ledge jutting from the face of the cliff.

The place was like a furnace. They could

hardly open their eyes because of the yellow glare and the shimmering waves of heated atmosphere that quivered over the surface of the baking rocks and made the distant landscape seem like a picture drawn on watered silk. For unnumbered centuries had the pitiless ruler of the heavens filled these valleys with heat and parched the uplands; and it is no wonder that the ancient villagers and farmers worshipped him with a sense of terror—as of a power to be appeased, and regarded as sacred gifts the fountains that sprang up so sparsely in their sun-smitten land. It was perfectly natural to think of them as favors shown from on high as long as the acts of the people pleased the Almighty Giver; and what penalty of divine wrath could be more natural or greater than to stop their flowing? Hence the springs were places of respectful obedience to the Lord; and here more than elsewhere the devout made their votive offerings, and prayed especially to the rain-gods to send their clouds as a shield over the people from the scorching wrath of this mighty Sun, who threatened daily to consume the land.

Such recollections and fancies were but natural suggestions to the minds of our adventurers as they stepped out of the cool and shady passage into the fierce sunshine; but their eyes quickly

accustomed themselves to the strong light, and they began at once the new examination, laying aside the ropes, miner's pick, and hatchet, which had been brought as aids in case of necessity, and stepping briskly along toward the abandoned dwellings of a people who had run their race so long ago, while the sun and the rain and the springs still did their work.

Small green and copper-colored lizards held up their heads an instant to watch them, and then scampered away; and a company of swallows, which had crowded their bottle-shaped nests of mud into a modern bird-pueblo on one of the old buildings, swirled about their heads and twittered a frightened protest against the intrusion.

The first two or three houses had been looked into before, and were quickly passed; after which the explorers began to enter and examine carefully many more or less ruinous structures quite new to them, for haste and their eagerness on the previous visit had led them to neglect this careful search. Sometimes it was easy to walk right over, or through a building, but usually the walls and partitions were firm and often well plastered, and in many cases the beams of the roof or upper floor were still in place. The stones were set in a mortar made of mud mixed with ashes; and the prolonged resistance to decay — perhaps through

a thousand years — was due to the walls being sheltered from wind and thunder-storms, and to the extreme dryness of the climate. In one house grew a scrub-oak ten inches in diameter, whose outward leaning had thrown down the wall.

A passage, or street, always ran around these houses, sometimes in front of them and sometimes behind, so that the two walked along easily, finding nothing novel or of service to them until they came almost to the end of the ledge, where, as already described, a great buttress terminated the platform. Here a mass of bushes half hid the last building, which, when they had forced their way into the rubbish, proved to be only a sort of archway, leading into an uncovered space; and here was something new, for they saw with surprise that the old citizens, knowing (as our friends could not) that the buttress was only a few yards thick, and that the rock was soft, had hewn a small tunnel leading from this hallway to a farther ledge on the same level, where many more houses had once been inhabited by these human wrens and swallows.

Inspired by this discovery, Cora sped eagerly on, peering in every hole and cranny, while Andy followed more slowly, spending five minutes or so in one place to pick up the fragments of a broken jar which he hoped he might glue to-

gether, and so preserve as a whole example of the ancient ornamented pottery. Going on, he called to his sister, but got no answer. A louder shout proved no more effective. Then he hastily searched through the ruins ahead, but could find her in none of them. The ledge grew narrow and came to an end after a short distance, and no tunnel went any farther — that was plain.

Could she have slipped off?

The thought chilled his heart, yet he felt sure if that had happened he would have heard a cry — a shriek. He crept to the edge and looked over.

Ledge after ledge dropped brokenly down to the summit of the talus, not so abruptly as underneath the other platform, but too steeply, at first, at least, to be reached from where he knelt. He could scan the whole space at a glance, and would surely have seen her body had she fallen.

He ran back through the tunnel to learn if she had slipped by him while he was picking up the broken jar, but she was not there. Greatly frightened, he rushed back, and again shouted as loudly as he could, so that the rocks echoed his voice far and wide. A hawk screamed back at him from the cliffs; a flock of cranes rose with a rattling response from the swampy riverside in the valley; but that was all. He was nonplussed,

and stood chilled with doubt and fear, when right at his elbow came a rush of footsteps, and Cora's voice ringing with gladness.

"Oh, Andy, I've *found* it! I've actually been down to the bottom!"

He was too astounded to utter a word either of joy or reproach, but only stared at her eager face.

"Come, and I'll show you!" she rattled on, and seizing his hand led him with rapid footsteps into one of the vacant houses, notable among the rest for its broad doorway. In its rear wall another large doorway apparently led into a dark inner chamber, as in several other buildings, but in reality opened into a passage in the rock which bent sharply to the left and sloped downward, dimly lighted from below.

Cora clattered down it, and Andy following closely, with the feeling that rough steps were under his feet, soon found himself out upon the next lower ledge.

From that point the descent was comparatively easy, for regular steps, still pretty well preserved, had been carved by the long-forgotten colonists, and a good trail, though probably invisible from below, zigzagged from ledge to ledge and led them out to the top of the bushy slope, whence they could easily have run down into the valley.

Why did they not do so—just for the glory and gratification of it?

Because a little cloud of dust was visible far down the valley; and in it, cantering toward them, were the prancing horses and gayly colored blankets and plumes of a band of wild nomads—the Badaween of the Southwest, the Navajos once more.



CHAPTER XXXI

DIVULGES AN AWFUL REVELATION FROM THE
RAIN-GODS

CLOUDS lay thick upon the mountains northward when the two returned to the surface and began their ride homeward. The sun was near its setting, for Andy had halted frequently as they came up to take measurements of the height and breadth of the various stairways and passages, and to study the possibility of clearing or widening to a more convenient size the place where the rift was obstructed by the fallen big stone, or in other ways. They watched with delight, as they cantered across the prairie, the magnificence of the sight as the lightning played through the dark

masses of vapors half hiding the summits, and listened without fear to the distant thunder echoed along the vault of the sky.

The storm was evidently widening, but fortunately held off until they had got quite to camp, when sudden gusts of wind came driving the rain before them, and all hands fled to the wagon. The first violence of the downpour was expended in half an hour or so, however, so that, although the rain continued, they were able to get supper, and ate it, sitting in the tent or under the wagon, with little inconvenience.

"I wonder how our old friend up among the rocks stands it," Annie remarked.

"Oh, he's all right," Zeph answered. "He'd stay down in the estufa as snug as a prairie-dog in his hole."

"Nibbling the hind leg of another prairie-dog to pass the time away," Carter added.

You see these youngsters were more cheerful than they had been the day before, and Cora was the heroine of the hour. Her sister would go and hug her now and then, as if she hadn't done the same ten minutes before, just to show how glad she felt. Annie was a gentle, home-loving little body, and hadn't the slightest desire in the world to do brave deeds or to meet with adventures. She begrudged every hour that kept her away from

her mother's loving companionship and her father's smile, and no one was more thankfully happy in the prospect of release than she. Thus supper was cooked and eaten with jollity, in spite of the rain.

Nevertheless, the question *What next?* had only been put a step forward: it had not been answered.

Granted that they now knew how they could get themselves, and what little they could carry on their backs, all the way down from the mesa-top to the valley land, how much better off would they be when they had got there? What should they do then? Where should they go? They were without knowledge of a road — probably there was none; or nothing but obscure Indian trails, and these the paths of hostile Indians. They might, perhaps, by great exertion, skirt around the foot of the mesa and climb up through one of the side-canyons to the wagon-road on the mountains by which they had come, and retrace it; but when they remembered the distance, the rough region to be traversed, and the scarcity of water, they shuddered at the idea of tramping it alone.

They knew, of course, the general direction, southeastward, in which friendly settlements lay, and had a fair idea of the distance; but between

the start and the finish of the journey lay what impossible canyons, what rugged hills, what arid plains and savage foes? How could they carry provisions and water, while they wandered about in search of right trails? To attempt to go away on foot in any direction seemed madness; yet how could they get the horses and wagon down, so as to be able to drive or ride? Zeph even went so far as to assert that they had better stay where they were until Mr. Manning came to rescue them, as he was sure to do sooner or later; but both Andy and Cora strongly objected to this view.

“We don’t know anything about father or whether he is able to come to us,—or even whether he is alive,” he added after a pause. “The great storm that overtook us and cut that chasm may— No, Annie, I don’t believe it! I think they were in a safe place and were not harmed—I really do; but what I want to say is, that it won’t do to wait in the expectation of somebody coming to help us. Our provisions won’t last long and the game here amounts to only a small herd and would soon be killed off.”

“Then we’ve got to get the horses and wagon down into the valley,” Cora declared resolutely.

“Jiminy!” shouted Carter, “won’t there be fun sending the mules down those long cellar-stairs!”

This was a picture! And it broke the meeting up in a burst of hearty laughter that dissipated the gloomy forebodings. Nevertheless, the facts remained!

One thing was certain. If they went away at all, they must take a part, at least, of their property with them; and the first thing necessary was to devise some means of doing so.

Suddenly old Whalpi appeared, but his accustomed smile was gone, and paying little attention to their salutations, he ate in silence the remains of their supper which Annie quickly placed before him. This done, he sought and plucked a dried sunflower leaf, and taking from his pouch some pinches of tobacco mixed with shredded bark, he rolled a large cigarette, and sitting down by the fire began to smoke, taciturn and moody.

"Have you read all the pictures?" Cora asked him, Andy, of course, translating question and answer.

"Yes, — all."

"Do they tell the history of the people who built the pueblo? Were they your old people?"

"Yes, they were the forefathers of the Mokis, who lived here many, many, many generations ago, when the gods used to come down to earth and talk with men, and the prairies were green, and all men and women were happy as children.

Ah, that was long, long in the past, when the whole country was green."

"Do the gods never come now?"

"No, never nowadays. I have often tried to learn why, but never could get an answer till I read these pictures left by the old people. They tell me that a stranger came from some far-off country, — I do not know where, — a giant, a noble warrior. The people made him chief and did what he said when he bade them forget the sun-gods and the rain-gods and the gods of the planting and of the corn-harvest; and they were wicked and listened to him, even when they saw that their ancient deities were offended and would come no more to visit their chosen people.

"Then the stranger went away, and the Moki became sorry for their faithlessness and begged the gods to return. They held a feast and danced all day in the kiva, and when at last all the others went away to sleep, one old servant of the sacred fire, like me, stayed behind alone; and with him the gods came in the night and talked, bidding him write these pictures on the wall."

The whole company was listening with vivid interest as this weird tale proceeded.

"And *you*," Andy exclaimed, "have read the *very things he wrote*?"

"Yes. The gods revealed to him that the

springs on all these northern mesas would quickly dry up, except only this one here, which should continue to flow as a reminder of what the people had lost; that all this country,"—and he waved both hands apart to show he meant a wide area, east and west and south,—“then so green and beautiful, should become dry and good for nothing to live upon. They told the priest that the people would be driven by famine and tempests, and by the northern savages, away to the dreary rocks toward Tusayan—alas! it has all come true.”

“Is that all?” Andy asked presently in his most kindly tone, when the Indian seemed disposed to say no more, leaving the wonderful tale half told.

“No, there is more. The picture-writings say that the divine messengers of the Sun promised that the gods would be long-suffering and patient with the few chosen Mokis left; but that if these forsook the old ways, and allowed themselves again to be led into forbidden paths by strangers, then the rain-gods would desert them altogether, their enemies would increase, the springs everywhere would be dried up, and all the tribe would perish.

“The last of the paintings is the greatest to me. It shows me that the noble priest could not bear to give his beloved people this awful message, but

leaving it inscribed upon the wall for their instruction, he lay down and at sunrise yielded up his soul to the Sun—the Great Father. I understand his heart.”

“To-morrow,” the old man resumed, after a solemn pause, met with sympathetic and half-fearful silence, “to-morrow I will hasten away and tell my stricken nation of its peril. I will warn and beg the foolish young people to spurn the new manners and ruinous teachings of the white people. I will not say your ways are not good for you, but they are bad for us. I will entreat the young men to return to the righteous customs of the forefathers, and perhaps I may thus turn my nation from its sins and its ruin before it is too late. But I fear it is too late now—too late—too late!”

“But, Whalpi,” said Andy, earnestly, after a little, and forgetting that nothing yet had been said to him of their discovery, “we, too, are going away. We have found a trail down the cliffs—an ancient road of your own old people.”

“I know it,” the Indian replied laconically, offering no explanation to satisfy their curiosity as to how he had learned this fact.

“It will be very hard work to get our goods down to the valley alone. We need your help. Can you not wait until we are ready?”

The Indian sat and smoked in gloomy silence for a long time. The river gurgled under the murmuring trees, the cedar boughs crackled in the fire and threw out their aromatic perfume, broken clouds scudded across the sky, now blotting out and now revealing the stars, and far out upon the gusty uplands the long-drawn, sighing wail of a coyote came like the cry of the spirit of the dead picture-writer, as the young people waited for the Indian's reply: —

“You have been good to me. I will stay.”

A moment afterward, with the courteous “*Buenas noches*” — Good night! — which he never omitted, the old fellow stalked off to his hut.

“Well,” said Zeph, as later they were about to break the circle and seek their beds, “we may find a worse place than this pleasant valley. Barring our anxieties, we've not had a bad month on this old mesa, and I, for one, can stand it awhile longer if I'm 'bleeged to.”

“I believe you're sorry you're going to be rescued,” laughed Cora.

“Well, I'm like a girl who is dead set on gettin' married, but likes the courtin' so well she ain't in no hurry to 'name the day'!”



CHAPTER XXXII

HAS MUCH TO DO WITH FIRE

Now that a way of escape was open, no time was to be lost. Soon after sunrise next morning all were busy and enthusiastic in hopeful preparations. The upshot of the evening's planning had been a decision that, if possible, the horses, mules, and wagon were to be taken down; and Andy's measurements made him confident that it could be done, at any rate so far as the animals were concerned, provided certain obstacles could be got out of the way.

Another smart shower had fallen during the night, and clouds still glowered about the mountains, but the air here was cool and breezy, and

everybody enjoyed the four-mile drive over the plateau to the head of the ravine. Andy, however, rode Jim, and circling about found a band of antelope and killed one, providing meat for the next two or three days. They had wisely disturbed the game very little, and so shooting it was easy.

The team was now unharnessed and turned loose with hobbles on their fore feet, and the party descended the gulch, taking with them the pickaxe, shovel, axe, and cold-chisel, which, with some other tools, formed a part of the outfit of every emigrant-wagon.

"Zeph," ordered Andy, as they started, "you and Carter and the girls begin at the top here and clear away a sort of path.

"All you need to do, I think, is to chop down a few bushes and shove loose stones one side, here and there, so that the animals won't stumble over them. Pick out the best road and make it as easy as you can for them."

Zeph threw off his coat to begin work at the top, and Andy and the Indian walked on down to the lower end of the rift. When they came to the wedged-in rock which obstructed its mouth, they heaped up a pile of stones to stand upon, and Andy began with his cold-chisel and hammer to drill a hole into the middle of the block. The

Indian watched him attentively, and after a while took his turn at the novel task. In a couple of hours or more the youngsters were heard rattling down the rift, the dogs prancing ahead and helping them proclaim that luncheon-time had come. The luncheon had been brought along, and Annie opened the package and spread it on a flat rock. Zeph reported, as they gnawed their cold deer-roast and pilot-bread, and drank gratefully from the water-bottles, that his "gang" had made a very decent road (decent, that is, for a mountain mule) down almost to the head of the rift, except in one place where it would be needful to use the pick and shovel an hour or so to enable the animals to descend an abrupt pitch.

"All right," said Andy, "we'll attend to that as soon as we get through here."

"What are you up to, anyhow?" Cora asked.

"We are going to blast away this rock. It's nothing but sandstone, and won't require much force."

"You will have to make a deep hole, won't you?"

"Yes, and that's what's bothering me. I've got to have a longer handle to the chisel, and I don't see how it is going to be put on."

The cold-chisel was simply a hardened and sharpened round steel bar about fourteen inches

long, with no socket in the head for a wooden handle, as has a carpenter's chisel.

"Strange I didn't think of that before," said Andy.

"I don't see how you can possibly fix a wooden handle on," said Zeph. "There's no room to bind it. It would need a sort of collar or tube of steel, shrunk on, to hold it, and we haven't such a thing."

Everybody studied the case, but had no suggestion to offer. Walpi was told of the difficulty, but could give no help, — this was out of his line. Finally Zeph suggested a method.

"I think," he said, "we could get a strong iron rod out of the brake of the wagon, and perhaps we could weld it on to the head of the chisel. Do you think it could be done?"

"I am sure it could *not*," Andy answered; "at least not in an open fire. It would be impossible to heat that hard steel to softness without a regular forge and bellows; and then we should have to re-temper it. Besides, I should hate to risk destroying the brake in this rough country."

A moment later Annie spoke:—

"Supposing you put powder in the hole you have already made, and fired it off — wouldn't that break the rock?"

"Not much. It might split off a piece."

“Let’s try it. If it broke off a pretty big piece, you could make another hole and break it again.”

“That would be slow work.”

“It seems to me worth trying,” the girl persisted. “I don’t see what else you can do.”

The suggestion was seconded by Zeph, and they decided to try the experiment. The hole was half filled with powder, a fuse of string rolled in damp powder was laid, the upper part of the hole tamped with rock dust, and in half an hour the thing was ready. Then Zeph took from his pocket the flint-and-steel box, which he always carried, and which had been the means of saving their precious matches many a time, and started a little fire — enough to get a blazing twig.

Walpi had watched these proceedings with great interest, and understood well what was on foot. Now he insisted upon being the one to light the fuse.

“I am old,” he said, “and my young brother ought not to go into danger. If I am hurt, it does not matter — I am near the end, anyhow.”

So every one else retreated to a safe distance; the Indian touched the fuse with his little torch and scrambled hastily after them. A few seconds later a dull report rumbled up and down the narrow canyon, and when the smoke and dust had cleared away, they returned to find that perhaps

a fifth of the block had been blown off, and a deep crack had been made in the remainder.

Then, while two spelled one another at drilling another hole, the remainder worked at cutting down and building up to form a path at the difficult place Zepñ had mentioned. So the afternoon passed, but by the time a second hole had been made in the rock, as deep as the length of the cold-chisel allowed, the shadows told them it was time to quit; and leaving the work for the day they went back to camp, very tired, hungry, and thirsty, and none the happier because a wrench given to one of the wheels had made driving the last half mile a very unsafe proceeding.

The instant camp was reached Cora hurried to revive the embers she had carefully buried in ashes, and so get something cooking; but the coals were black and dead. Her brothers had laughingly called her (since Whalpi arrived) the Priestess of the Sacred Fire, on account of her great care to keep its embers alive over night, so as not to use matches in rekindling. Matches were not as common nor as cheap and good in those days as they are now, and the flint-and-tinder method was slow and troublesome. Now, when she most needed it, the damp weather and wood of the past few days, or her insufficient care, had caused a failure, and she felt very badly.

"Anybody got a match?" she called out.

"Yep," Carter answered, and fumbling in his pockets at last found one, which he hastily drew, boylike, along the leg of his trousers.

"Plague on it," he exclaimed angrily. "The dad-blasted thing broke!"

Cora simply looked at him. He hunted high and low, but could find no other. Andy searched his clothing and his trunk, but none appeared. Annie almost tearfully confessed that a few she had had two days ago had got wet in the rain and were ruined. Just then Zeph and the Indian came in from looking after the stock, and the former was hailed with a request for his flint and steel.

He felt in one pocket after another, and a blank look spread over his freckled face, which would have made the others laugh had not they been too tired and hungry to see anything funny in the situation.

"Hang it all! I've left it in the rift, where we lit that little fire."

Walpi looked on greatly mystified by the sudden silence and the look of horror in every face.

"What is the trouble?" he asked with sympathetic interest.

Andy explained their predicament.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and his wrinkled old

face lightened. "Don't let my children be cast down. I'll make fire for you as quick as a blue-jay could fly across the valley."

He trotted off to his hut, where his wallet was lying, and returned, unwinding as he ran a little bundle of cords and sticks. One was a flat piece of soft wood about an inch wide and a foot long, full of shallow pits on its upper side, each with a notch from the pit to the edge of the slat. Another was a round rod, twice as long and thick as a lead pencil. A third was a miniature bow; and a fourth a small saddle-shaped block, with a hole on its under side. He went to an old stump near by, and brought a handful of the powdery dead wood from beneath its rotten bark. Then he laid the flat, pitted piece on the ground and placed the powdered punk in and about one of the little pits. Setting one end of his rod in the pit, he wound about its upper end the loose string of his little bow, then fixed on the summit of the rod the saddle-like block.

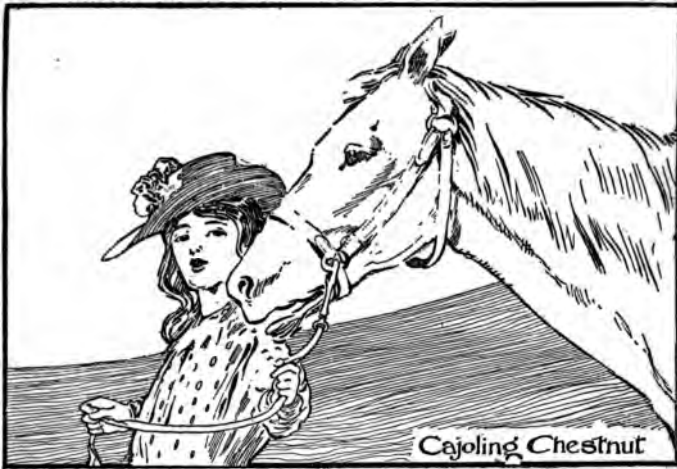
Kneeling down, while the others gathered curiously about him, he pressed the front of his chin on the "saddle," so as to hold the rod firmly upright, with its lower end in the pitted stick, and began to move the bow rapidly back and forth. This caused the string to wind and unwind, and revolve the rod back and forth with great rapidity.

It was exactly the contrivance civilized jewellers use in drilling gold-plate, etc., but purely an aboriginal invention for all that.

The effect of this motion, under the firm pressure of his chin, was to grind the hardwood rod into the shavings and soft wood, and quickly heat them by friction. When machinists drill metal in a similar way, they must keep their tools and the hole cool by bathing them in water or oil. Here the development of heat was the first object, and in about a minute blue smoke curled up. Then the workman doubled his efforts, and fine coals began to fall into the heap of dry dust beside it, whereupon Whalpi stopped his drilling, stooped quickly, blew the sparks into more life, and in another minute was skilfully feeding a minute flame and nursing it into a real fire.

“Isn't that ingenious?” exclaimed Andy.

“A most remarkable example of Injun-uity!” cried Cora — and fled to her pantry.



CHAPTER XXXIII

RELATES THE HOODWINKING OF CHESTNUT

THE first thing requiring attention next morning was the repair of the slight damage to the fore running-gear of the ambulance, and the moment breakfast was over Andy began the work.

"Zeph," he shouted, "where is the monkey-wrench. I can't do anything till I get this wheel off."

"In the tool-box, I suppose."

"But it isn't here — I've searched carefully. Who had it last — have *you* seen it, Carter?"

"Me? No, I ain't seen it since we used it that day — 'member, Zeph? — when we went back after the quinine and you took out the wrench

to do something or other with it — hammer a bent buckle on your girth, I guess. Don't you remember?"

"Ye-es, — I do — now; but I allow I put it back in the tool-chest."

"I'll bet you didn't. I'll bet you laid it down on a rock or something and forgot it, just as you did your flint and steel."

All hands searched high and low, and came to the conclusion Carter was right — greatly to Zeph's chagrin.

"I reckon there's nothing for it but for me to ride back and look for it," he said ruefully.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Cora.

"Well — it's rough," said Andy, "but the sooner you start, the better. Better take Jim. He'll go fastest, but it'll take you all day, anyhow."

Zeph took the bridle and started after the horse, when Cora called after him: —

"Bring in Chestnut, too, and I'll ride a mile or so with you. I haven't had a good gallop in a 'coon's age; and I'll put you up some lunch."

Fifteen minutes later they were mounted, and with Annie's parting injunction to be sure and go over to the brink of the chasm and see whether there were any traces of papa having been there, the two friends cantered off.

When, an hour later, Cora came back, her hair

flying and eyes sparkling with the exercise, she found that Andy and Whalpi had ridden off on Carter's horse and one of the mules to work at splitting the boulder, and Annie and Carter had just finished putting the camp in order.

"Cote," said her sister, as the girl dismounted, and Carter began to unsaddle, "Andy says we are to pack everything that we can spare into the wagon to-day, because he means to move camp to-morrow to the head of the ravine, so as to be all ready to go down; and I thought we'd better wash our clothes to-day, for over there we won't have water."

"That's a good idea — let's go at it, and we can do some sewing this afternoon. I'm glad of a restful day — aren't you?"

"I certainly am."

These housewifely cares occupied the day pleasantly; and in the afternoon Carter went off with his gun and brought in a dozen or more doves, which he plucked and, under Annie's instruction, made ready for broiling when supper-time came.

As sunset approached Carter was sent to a ridge-top near by, from which he could see far and wide, and was told to signal to the girls, by waving a leafy branch, when he saw the boys coming, for the young housekeepers meant to

surprise them with dinner on the table. The plan worked so beautifully that all three came together, dashing into camp on the gallop, and yelling like a charge of cavalry—all but Whalpi, who hung on to the mane of the old mare and thanked his gods he had not broken his neck in this foolish play.

Andy had exploded two charges and got rid of more than half the rock. Then he had drilled a hole and put a charge into a projection of the wall and blown that off, and so made a passage wide enough to let the horses pass. Thus that great obstacle was got out of the way, and the rest seemed easy.

Zeph had found the wrench, and had had no adventures nor used up either himself or his horse.

“I went out to the brink of the chasm, and couldn't see any sign that Mr. Manning or any one else had ever been on the farther side. Another torrent was tumbling down the mountain, cutting the trough deeper and deeper,—a boom from the last rains, I reckon,—and the big gorge has a regular river in its bottom, full of rocks and whirlpools. I think the worst one of all is right where the ridge was on which we ran across—gosh! that was a close call!”

Whalpi was immensely interested by this infor-

mation, and looked very serious when its purport was repeated to him.

"I fear the gods still dwell in the house of wrath," he muttered.

All was now ready to begin the descent. The plan was first to take down the horses, and on the following day to get the mules and camping things down to the valley. When they drove over next morning, therefore, all the horses were taken along, and as soon as possible the experiment was to be begun of leading them down the ravine. No signs of any Navajos were visible in the long extent of valley open to their view.

"I'm thinking," remarked Andy, "that we'd better begin with Chestnut. He is the smallest and most easily managed."

The other horses were tied to the wheels of the ambulance, the mules turned loose, and all started down with the pony. He submitted quietly to being led down the ravine, whose roughness of path was nothing unusual for a pony of his experience, as far as the entrance to the rift, but he objected strenuously to that narrow passage. They pulled him and pushed him in vain: not a step would he budge — and no wonder!

"Go away — the whole lot of you," Annie cried out at last. "Let me try. Chestnut and I are old friends, aren't we?" she whispered as she

patted the nose of her pet and smoothed his mane.

For a long time she soothed his fears by her words and caresses. Then she drew from her pocket one of the last of their lumps of sugar, and step by step, with many halts and arguments, and now and then a sweet reward, she gradually led him down to the open ledge, and as far along it as the house behind which was the entrance to the lower stairway.

Here an unexpected obstacle presented itself. The front door would admit the pony, but the opening in the rear wall was too narrow and low. A few minutes' work with a pickaxe remedied this, but it brought many scowls to the face of the old Moki, who had been so deeply impressed by the greatness of his ancestors that he thought some ill-luck would surely follow the demolition of anything they had left.

But, alarmed by the work or some other fear, Chestnut now balked, and refused to go into the half-dark house. Persuasion and scolding alike failed, and perhaps they never would have succeeded, had not the Indian suggested blindfolding him.

But with what?

Andy's blank look was answered by Annie's ready wit, for the next minute the girl's sunbonnet

was off her head and slipped over the pony's eyes. Amid giggles of half-suppressed merriment she led him up and down once or twice, talking to him the while, and then into and through the ruin, and down the steep stairway, his fears calmed by her tone and the friendly hand at his bit.

A few minutes later those looking down from the ledge saw the girls and their pony standing safely below at the head of the bushy talus slope.

Annie and Cora stayed below while the others went back for Jim and the old mare, on whose saddles were strapped one of the thick canvas carriage curtains, and a couple of blankets, for Zeph was to stay below with the horses all night.

When the mules saw the two horses being led away, they all came running after them and began to follow down the ravine; and it is quite likely they would have come all the way had they not been driven back.

"That's all right," said Zeph. "They'll get so lonesome 'fore morning it'll be no trick at all to get them down. That's the way with mules that travel in a bunch. Where one goes — especially if it's a horse — all must go. They're just dead stuck on the old mare, and won't be easy till they find her again. You must picket 'em to-night in camp or like as not they'll give you the slip and run over here."



“The girl’s sunbonnet was slipped over the pony’s eyes.”



It was a good two hours of tedious, patient labor and risk to lead those horses down, but it was safely accomplished at last; and by two o'clock all except Zeph had climbed back to the summit of the mesa, finding the mules gathered at the foot of the ravine, where the boys had barred the outlet with poles, expecting they might do this very thing.

After they had rested a little while, and Whalpi had had a smoke and a nap, Andy proposed that he, Carter, and the Indian should carry down a load of goods.

"I say, girls, couldn't you get us up some supper here, and then we could drive back late in the evening."

"Why, I suppose we could. We could give you pilot-bread and the last of the bacon, and some tunas — lots of 'em growing about here."

"Oh, well, that'll do for to-night, and it'll save us a lot of time. What do you say, Whalpi?"

"It is well," he assented laconically.

So each made a bundle of property; but before going the mules were caught and tied by picket ropes, each to a stout bush, for the lads didn't want to lose time and labor in catching them when they got back, and there was no telling what the animals might do in their present uneasy state of mind.

It was after three o'clock when they finally went away, and fully six when they returned, for they had waited to select a place for a camp in the river-bottom, and to build for Zeph a neat little wigwam of willows, which Whalpi had showed them how to bend and tie into a capital dome-shaped hut, covered with the gray front curtain of the ambulance, which would not attract attention by its color among the dull-tinted, willow-brush.

Both were very tired, and saw with delight the preparations for supper; but they also saw, what the girls had been watching with growing dread, that a new storm was raging in the mountains and swiftly spreading out over the mesa. So fast it came that it was all they could do to throw the loose things into the ambulance and jump in after them, taking their grub with them to eat as best they could. The curtains had hardly been closed before torrents of rain were beating on the roof of the vehicle.



CHAPTER XXXIV

SHOWS HOW THE RAIN-GODS PUNISHED THE MOKIS

IT was certainly raining—four quarts to the gallon, good measure and running over. Old Whalpi's gods seemed to be making a desperate assault upon enemies entrenched behind the icy battlements of the Sierra Madre, and the thunders of a tremendous cloud-battle reverberated from the peaks.

Rain, wind, and noise increased, until shortly such a tempest raged about their shaken shelter as the wanderers had never seen but once before, and all thoughts turned in comparison to the cloud-burst which had whirled, yes, almost floated them, on to the mesa a month before. Though

not long after sunset, the darkness of night enshrouded them, lit only by lightning, fast and furious.

The scene was striking enough for all, but the old fanatic seemed fascinated, and sat so near the open front of the ambulance that he was not half sheltered. The wind blew toward them from the west, and the constant thunder, as it rolled near and nearer, seemed to jar the wagon with its deep reverberations, which succeeded one another as rapidly as the firing of a battery in action.

And the lightning! None of them had ever seen anything to equal it. Now and then a zig-zag flash left its sharp imprint upon the eye long after the darkness had swallowed its dazzling track; but chiefly the lightning was of that universal kind which lights up earth and sky in one vivid, violet blaze.

When one of these broad and enduring glares of purple fire burst out, the interior of the wagon, the faces of all the hushed company, and the features of the whole landscape were exposed, as if a black shutter had been raised, then dropped, before their eyes.

Old Whalpi's visage, out there in front where the rain and hail beat and the lightnings glared upon it, was a subject for a painter like Doré.

His lips were open and his rapt eyes glittered as the electric blaze lifted out of the murk, almost incessantly, the rocky heights beneath which the old pueblo stood and its round watch-tower on the summit—here in plain view.

Suddenly a prodigiously sharp and loud report and a blinding gush of violet flame filled the air, shot through by a bolt of fire which, plainly seen by all, fell full upon the ancient tower and shivered it to atoms; and at this, with a yell of mortal terror, the priest of the Mokiis sprang from his seat and darted away into the night and the tempest toward the scene of the catastrophe.

Such storms never last long, and before midnight this one died away into merely a respectable drizzle. Any return to camp that night was, of course, not to be thought of, and the four brothers and sisters curled up as best they could and tried to sleep, but found it a failure; and never had they found the coming of morning more welcome. With the first daylight they looked for the mules, and were more than pleased to find them still picketed and unhurt, though they looked very disconsolate. All wondered how Zeph had fared, and Andy was starting to look him up when that youth presented himself in doleful plight.

"Oh, Zeph," Cora called out in genuine greeting, "I'm so glad to see you alive! Wasn't it awful down there?"

"Rather damp. Just look at me," and he wrung a stream of moisture out of his coat.

"Why, you'll catch your death-cold!"

"No, I won't. The sun'll dry me up in a few minutes. Here it comes — look!"

"As a rule," drawled Andy, "I'm a heap more fond of the setting than the rising sun," as all eyes turned toward the great orange disk lifting grandly above the red crags and plateaus that stretched far away into the southeast, "but I'm right glad to see him this time. How'd you get on?"

"Get on? I never slept a wink. Had to stand up and hold my mouth shut to keep from drowning; and then I had to hop round like a chicken on a hot shovel to keep from freezing. Fine night for August *that was!*"

"Didn't the horses stampede?"

"No — they're all right. Hid in the brush; crawled out at daybreak looking like drowned rats. Say, didn't the lightning strike up here somewhere?"

"Knocked that tower on the top of the Butte into smithereens. But you'd 'a' laughed to see old Whalpi go flying out into the rain when he saw the stones come down, yelling like one of his

fiends. I expect he thought all the gods were after him that time *sure!*"

"I wonder where Whalpi is, and why he don't come back," said Annie. "I hope no harm has happened to him."

"We must go back to camp if we expect to get any breakfast," Cora interrupted. "I have nothing for you here, and we ought to have a cup of hot tea or coffee — even if it is the last we shall get."

"Let's be goin' then, right smart," exclaimed Zeph, and he set off at a stiff dog-trot, his teeth chattering in spite of his pluck, to bring in the mules, which rattled them over the road to camp at almost runaway speed, so delighted were they to have a chance to warm up, — or perhaps they hoped to find their friends, the horses, there.

The trees had so sheltered the tent that everything seemed in fair order; and on the under side of the log they had left smouldering in a bank of ashes, coals were still alive sufficient to start a fire.

"Carter, run and get me a pail of water from the spring the first thing," cried Annie, as they came to the tent.

"I'll go with you," said Cora; "it will do me good to wash my face in the cold water."

"And me, too," exclaimed Andy and Zeph in chorus.

"Oh, well, wait till I get some towels and we'll

all go," Annie called out laughingly, — "and wash each other's faces, if you like."

So presently all trooped off together in gay mood, while Nig and Bimber, who had passed a wretched night under the wagon, frisked and barked as though this were a picnic. The distance was short, and three minutes took them to the nook in the rocky hillside where the noble fountain gushed out so copiously to run its brief, romantic career. With one mind the merry group stopped short and stood dumb in amazement and consternation.

The great spring was dry!

There were the overhanging rocks, the circle of reeds and aquatic plants, the big stone upon which they were wont to stand and dip water; but instead of bubbling crystal liquid, they saw only a basin of stones. The outlet carried no current, the channel was empty, no noisy torrent swirled and eddyed to its eclipse in the dark cave, and nothing but a pool left here and there remained of the Sacred Spring and its marvellous river.

All this at a glance; and a second glance showed Whalpi sitting on the bank of the vacant basin, his head bowed into his hands.

They ran forward and spoke to him, but he paid no heed, until Annie, laying her hand upon

one of his, begged him to come to their fire and dry his soaked garments and get something to eat. Then he answered, but without raising his head:—

“No — leave me, my daughter — thou who hast been as a flower in my path, or a cool wind in the desert. Leave me. What was told by the fathers has come true. The gods have overturned the watch-tower, for now there is no longer need of a watchman, and stopped the life-giving spring. The Mokis must perish off the face of the earth.”

No arguments could move him; and filling their bucket from one of the pools which here and there remained in the deeper spots of the channel, each bade him a kindly *adios* and turned away. At the top of the bank they looked back. The sunlight was blazing down into the hollows of the empty fountain, but the lonely figure beside it had vanished.

Awed by this strange phenomenon and its mystic meaning, which would startle the least superstitious, and shocked by the thought of what it would have meant to them a fortnight before, it is no wonder that the breakfast was prepared and eaten almost in silence, and that a feeling that somehow the pretty valley had become uncanny chilled the blitheness of each young traveller.

An hour later, having loaded the tent, kitchen chest, and everything else into the wagon, they bade farewell to the place which had been their home for the most momentous month of their lives, not precisely with regret, yet startled and saddened at their strange dismissal.



CHAPTER XXXV

SEES THE PARTY SAFELY DOWN IN THE VALLEY

ARRIVED at the head of the ravine again, the first thing to be done was to get the four mules down into the valley. Zeph started ahead, leading one by a halter, Andy followed leading one and driving another, — all had on their harness, — and Carter followed with the fourth. They went well enough as far as the rift, in whose narrow and steep passages they began to take an interest, with ears cocked forward, that betokened trouble; but they were skilfully handled and taken out on the ledge all right.

Here the leader balked, but Zeph was patient and gentle, kept quiet, and let the animal become

accustomed to its surroundings, and worked it along to the little tunnel. Here came another halt, but after a bit the mule began to smell of the walls against which the horses had rubbed, and stepped along through; the others were kept well behind, but not out of sight, and they watched the actions of their leader with intense interest. It was evident that the first mule perceived that its lost friends, the horses, had been there, and wanted to follow their trail, but was timid — probably fearing some sort of trap. But Zeph was an old friend, and where he was it seemed safe, and so little by little Zeph worked it along to the last house, through which it was necessary to go to reach the lowest stairway. Here the mulish mind was seized with doubt, just as Chestnut had been, and the boys thought that once more would they have to use Annie's sun-bonnet, when Zeph managed to get the animal's nose against the door-post. It began to sniff up and down and step forward. Zeph let it go.

"I do believe," one might see the animal saying to itself, "I do believe those horses went down this way. Yes, it must be so; and this is the way for me to follow — and maybe if I hurry I'll catch 'em!"

The result was a plunge, and the way the boy and the mule clattered down that rough, dark

trail threatened the destruction of both. It was all Zeph could do to keep his feet and escape being crushed against the wall; as it was, he was well bruised before he got to the bottom.

The other mules, seeing their leader disappear, and easily able to smell its trail, dropping their noses to the ground like dogs to do so, went down more steadily, but without trouble; and the result was that in about three-quarters of an hour all the stock was picketed together in the valley, well hidden among thickets of tall willows from the eyes of any wandering redskins.

The girls had not gone below the ledge, and as soon as they saw the animals and their drivers emerge safely on the top of the talus they hastened above and began to unpack cooking things and various necessities which must be got down as soon as possible.

When the boys returned, lunch was ready; and half an hour later all five shouldered as large bundles as they could carry and descended with them. It was hard work, and they were glad to rest awhile at the bottom, where a little camp was built in a small glade among willows and cottonwoods near the border of a branch of the main river, which they found, after a little exploration, enclosed on this side a large, bushy island, where the stock was turned loose, with the old

mare hobbled. It was comical to see how closely the mules stuck to this horse, as if determined not to lose her a second time.

But it was needful that more things should be brought down, and the lads a third time that day toiled to the summit of the mesa, refusing to let the girls go — they had done enough. Here they made up loads for the next morning, as well as to be carried down that night, and Zeph was sufficiently curious to take a run over to the pueblo, but came quickly back to tell them that the lightning had not only scattered the tower, but that the wind had toppled over upon the estufa a wall which stood near, filling it with rubbish, so that no one could now get at the picture-writings except by long digging; and lastly that the pond was dry, save for a few pools.

Gathering up their packages, they started down the hill-path, and were toiling along the ledge, when they were startled to encounter the old medicine man, sitting in the doorway of one of the cliff-houses, his face buried between the wan hands on his knees as before.

They hailed him eagerly. They were glad to see him, pitied him in his distress, and wanted to cheer him up, for all had come to like the queer old fellow a great deal. They told him so, and warmly invited him to come with them; but

with simple dignity and inflexible firmness he thanked them and refused all entreaties.

“Go,” he said, stretching out a hand as if to bless. “Go, my children, and may all of your gods smile upon you as the sun of May gladdens the flowers.”

So they left him and tramped on; and as they went they heard the lonely crags and ruined houses of a lost people echoing a plaintive chant that rose and fell upon the breeze, and went and came again, the very soul of grief.

One who has not been through the experience can hardly realize with what intense enjoyment the boys drank that evening from the sweet and cool water of the river, after working through a hot day upon the dead and tepid liquid in their canteens. There is drouth in the very scenery, and thirst in the dusty air.

Nor was this all of their pleasure, for the ancient beaver-dams, now overgrown with bushes, which filled all this part of the creek-bottom and no doubt still harbored many an industrious colony, enclosed shady pools too tempting to be resisted. The young men were soon heels over head into one of them, while Annie and Cora were to be heard splashing somewhere beyond the willows. Soft green grass was another luxury

to which they had long been strangers, and they lounged upon it in restful contentment as they saw the cook put the very last slice of bacon into the frying-pan as grease for the jerked deer-meat, and resolved to postpone till to-morrow any worry as to where more was coming from.

“Some Nimrod’ll have to do some more shooting presently,” remarked Cora, but nobody responded.

Nevertheless, they did not forget that they were now in the country of the Philistines, and must keep their eyes peeled for Amalekites. Carter and the girls had learned enough of frontier caution to be careful, without instruction, in building their fire to use nothing but dry sticks, so as to avoid smoke as far as possible; and when it became dark, all hands knew better than to make the big fire which would have been so enjoyable in this pretty spot, but gathered comfortably ’round a mere heap of coals which would not easily be noticed from a distance through the bushes that hemmed it in. For the same reason the conspicuous white tent was not set up, the girls using it instead to lay their beds upon, folding the corners up over them when they went to sleep.

There was one comfort — no guard needed to be kept. Bimber, indeed, in this strange place

seemed to feel anew his responsibility as night-watchman.

It was his regular custom — nobody had taught him, it was just a relic of his wild ancestry lingering as an instinct in his mind — to make the rounds of the camp as soon as the dusk began to deepen. He would march warily, ears cocked up, nostrils sniffing, in a large circle about the bivouac, now and then giving tongue to a low, defiant bark, warning all and sundry to keep away, and making sure that no red enemy was lurking near. Nig would follow after as a sort of supporting guard, but Bimber, as always, was the moving spirit, and it was not until he had made his rounds completely that he would come to the fire and curl up for his evening snooze. He always did this, but to-night was more cautious and thorough than usual, and seemed to appreciate the justice of the reward when Cora patted the little black head which lay against her knee and called him her corporal of the guard.

No Indians had been noticed, to be sure, for many days, but there was no telling when some wandering band might not appear, nor what mischief would follow. The redskins might prove friendly toward these stray "palefaces," but they might *not*!



The band raced out of range

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN WHICH REDSKINS APPEAR AND A FORT IS BUILT

NOTHING happened to disturb the company that night, however, and early next morning, well rested, they were up and at work. They were roused, indeed, by Zeph, who had stolen out with the earliest dawn, and walking quietly up the valley, had stalked a band of antelope and shot a handsome buck, which he brought back before the camp was awake, and announced with a shout that opened the sleepy eyes soon after sunrise.

Breakfast over, all hands were starting to climb the mesa, when Zeph suggested that it would be a good idea to catch and tether the animals on this side the creek near camp.

“There’s no telling what the critters may do when they find we’ve gone — and they’ll know it soon enough. The horses wouldn’t guess it in a week, but those mules know everything that is going on. I believe they can see farther into the future than old Whalpi himself, in spite of his gods and his medicine.”

This precaution taken, they slowly ascended to the summit of the mesa; and there, while the girls wrapped a bundle apiece in a carriage curtain and lugged them off, the boys dragged out the four large, movable chests and two trunks, and began to work them down the steep and winding path, here letting them slide, and there lifting and carrying, one by one, until at last they were all down. Then they were piled in a neat heap on the higher ground just outside the bushy bottom-lands, where they might easily be loaded upon the wagon, when, last of all, that should be brought down and put together. By this time it was noon.

Luncheon over, the boys started off for another trip to the summit of the mesa, leaving the sisters in camp, who promptly curled up under a tree on the bank of the river and went at fishing with a bent pin on the end of a thread. They had not been intent upon this peaceful occupation long enough to find out whether it was going to be

worth their trouble or not, when they were startled by Andy, who came dashing through the bushes with the other two lads, the dogs at his heels, and all made straight for the place where the horses and mules were feeding.

“What’s the matter?” cried Cora, jumping up.

“Redskins!” Carter shouted, as he plunged into the willows after his brother; and hearing this, the girls dropped their rods and ran after him as hard as they could go.

The stock was tethered in a glade just beyond, and, each person seizing the lariat of the horse or mule nearest him, the small herd was soon hidden among the bushes and re-tied.

Then the boys found time to explain that from the ledge they had caught sight of a band of Indians coming up the valley from the southwest. They were three or four miles away as yet, and on the other side of the river, but there was no counting upon their staying there.

“This would be a mighty bad place to be caught in,” Zeph exclaimed. “They could creep through the brush, like the snakes they are, and shoot us down before we laid eyes on ’em at all.”

“That’s so,” Andy agreed. “On the other hand, they may overlook us and ride by, that is, as long as they stay on the other side of the river.”

"Couldn't we set the boxes in a sort of square so as to form a kind of fort?" asked Cora. "You know men on the plains have beaten off Indians — crowds of them — by fighting behind wagons and piles of goods."

"Yes, I reckon that's what we'll have to do, if they find us and it comes to a fight."

"And only three guns," groaned Carter. "I wish that plaguy bear hadn't busted my shotgun!"

A reminiscent grin swept over the faces of the crowd, in spite of "the gravity of the situation," as the newspapers would say.

They hurried to their chests and dragged them into three sides of a hollow square, where a large rock would protect their rear. Then a log was found and laid on top; bundles of blankets banked it up, and many big stones were added. All together they had constructed in twenty minutes or so a low breastwork, hardly large enough for them all to get into, which was a little better than nothing. As a last touch the tent was doubled and spread over one corner, with the stiff carriage curtains on top of it.

"That'll be some protection for the girls against arrows, anyhow," said Andy, as they finished; "and lots of these rascals have no guns. 'Tain't much of a bombproof, but may save some wounds."

In a few minutes more the ammunition and everything needed had been placed within the tiny fort, especially all the water they could put into their bottles, coffee-pot, tin pail, and everything that would hold it. Nothing remained but to wait for what might happen.

"I'm thankful we've been so careful of ammunition," said Andy.

"And *I'm* thankful," exclaimed Cora, "that father had the prudence always to keep a large supply in the ambulance stores. Oh, if only he were here!"

From their position they could see a good distance down the valley, but were not themselves likely to attract attention. Presently a small company of riders was discerned trotting across an opening in the trees a quarter of a mile below.

"There they are!" whispered Annie, who was the first to catch sight of them, and whose face was pale, though her resolution kept her from open fright. Cora showed her excitement differently. She was angry, and longed for another rifle, that she might take a hand in the fray.

"If only the dogs won't bark!" she exclaimed as she cuddled Bimber.

Here's where the terrier's dog sense was likely to do harm to the masters and friends he would wish to help. He was ready to fight in their

defence, but he didn't know human tactics, and could not be expected to understand that dog tactics would not serve in an Indian war.

But the Indians — there were fifteen or twenty of them — were passing on out of sight in a straggling line; and it seemed likely they would go right on up the valley, when one of the mules and then another began to bray as if possessed by imps. Back came the loud whinny of a mustang, and the boys knew they were in for it. The redskins instantly halted, and could be seen pointing out to one another the place where the mules had raised such an ill-timed clamor, and then the band raced back down the river, and disappeared beyond the opening through the trees where they were first seen.

“Why, they've run away!” said Carter.

“They're looking for a ford, I reckon. Zeph, run out on that knoll and let us know the moment they show themselves on this side.”

A few minutes later Zeph waved his arms as a signal, and came back to the fort on the jump.

“They're just beyond that point of brush,” he exclaimed, and the words were hardly out of his mouth when the clatter of galloping hoofs was heard and the band came toward them with a rush. Every one crouched low until the Indians were only a hundred yards away, when Andy rose

straight up, and setting his rifle to his shoulder drew a bead on the foremost rider.

In an instant the whole band wheeled and raced out of range.



CHAPTER XXXVII

IS A STORY OF BATTLE

HAVING ridden off out of range, the redskins halted and held a talk, many dismounting. Presently one remounted and came forward alone, holding up both hands to show he was unarmed and on an errand of peace. Andy stood up again, rifle in hand, but not aiming it until the warrior had come to a point about a hundred yards from the fort. Then up came the muzzle and the rider stopped his pony.

"I want to talk," he shouted in broken Spanish, and slid off his horse.

"I am going out to talk with him," said Andy. "Everybody stay under cover, so that he can't see

how many of us are here, and you, Zeph, keep watch with your gun ready to stop any tricks. Hold my rifle, Carter."

Andy sprang over the breastwork and marched out, and ahead of him raced a little runaway dog, straight for the Indian's naked calves. A minute later Cora's ears were distracted by a heart-rending yelp as the Navajo's leathern quirt curled lovingly (and stingingly) around the dog's waist, and Bimber retreated in good order to tell his friends in voluble dog language what he thought of redskins in general and that one in particular. From Nig, however, he got no sympathy. Her gruff *woof!* said plainly: "Served you right for being a fool."

Meanwhile they saw Andy meet the Indian — who stood leaning on his horse, a fine black animal — and hold a short conversation. Then the enemy sprang upon his horse and cantered away, and Andy walked rapidly back to his army.

"What did he say?" was the question on all lips.

"Said we had come into their country without asking permission of its owners — the Navajos — and must get out. If we would go straight away and leave all our stock and goods, they would not harm us. If not, they'd kill us, and take our stuff anyhow."

"Mercy!" cried Annie, under her breath.

"What'd you tell him?" Zeph growled.

"Told him he lied; and that if he wanted us, he'd have to come and take us — a lot of us! I don't believe he knows two are girls and the rest nothing but boys. You must all lie low and not let him know it, either. If we started off afoot, the redskins would surely give chase, sooner or later, and kill us or make us slaves. There's no trusting 'em; and even if they didn't, we'd most likely fall into the clutches of some other band or starve to death. May as well take our chances right here."

"Of course we will," Cora declared grimly.

"Carter, where's your pistol?"

"Here, in my belt."

"Well, you use that, and give me that shot-gun, — it's too heavy for you anyhow, — mayn't I have it, Andy?"

"Do you think you can shoot straight — won't go crazy?"

"Crazy? — *Pouf!* If I didn't really think I could do better for all of us with the gun than little Carter, I wouldn't ask it."

"Well, take it," said Andy, "and shoot through that opening there beside Zeph. Nan, you stay close under cover and be ready to play surgeon or — chaplain!"

While these preparations were making, all kept an eye on what their enemies were doing. At first they gathered in a bunch and talked for five or ten minutes. Then they began throwing off their coats and blankets and tying them behind their saddle-cloths or round their waists, and drawing bows and arrows from the rabbit-skin cases now slung across their naked shoulders. When all were ready and mounted, one of them — the only one who had a gun (which proved to be an old Mexican army-musket) stepped out in front and harangued them for a long time, working their courage up to noisy enthusiasm, then suddenly whirled his horse about and led the first charge.

“Here they come!” exclaimed Andy. “Lie low and be ready, but wait for orders.”

Lashing and kicking their scraggy ponies, and whooping like a pack of coyotes (setting the two dogs barking loudly), the savages came rushing toward the small fortress in a whirlwind of noise, dust, and gravel. As they got within gun-range they scattered widely, and every mother’s son of them threw himself down on the farther side of his horse, where he clung by his heel, and supported his body in a loop of his lariat fastened to the cinch, or around the pony’s neck. In that position the Indians were largely protected from

bullets, and at the same time able to shoot either over or under the pony's neck.

"Don't fire till I tell you," Andy commanded. "Zeph, you take that big fellow on the black horse. I can't kill a man I've just been chatting with. I'll take the chief. Cora, Carter, hold your fire till I speak.

"Now!"

Two echoing shots rang out almost as one, followed by the unexpected crack of the pistol. The black horse tumbled on his head and lay still, but his rider leaped nimbly to his feet and dropped out of sight behind a bush. Carter's bullet, let loose in pure nervousness, hit, by chance, one of the riders, who dropped his bow and nearly fell, but managed to regain his seat and force his horse to carry him on out of range. Andy had apparently missed the flying target he aimed at, but the chief or some other archer had not missed *him*, for of the half a dozen arrows which came pelt-
ing into the fort, one glanced off the canvas, under which Annie and the dogs were cowering, and buried its head in the calf of the hero's leg.

In an instant Annie was at her brother's side, scissors and water and bandage — a strip from a petticoat — ready for service, and was ripping open his trousers' leg to get at the wound, from which she had withdrawn the arrow.

“Never mind it!” Andy called out with his eye on the foe. “No time now!”

Those in front had galloped on, but the rear half of the band swung inward and dashed close past the left front of the fort in a circular course, sending a flight of arrows and fleeing southward like the wind. Instead of ordering Cora to fire, Andy, to her indignation, snatched the gun from her hands and let fly two charges of buck-shot. One horse was hit so hard he never reappeared, and the other shot went wild; but the effect was to check the onslaught and hasten the retreat.

The Indians halted about an eighth of a mile below, dismounted, and waited until their fellows had joined them, by making a safely wide detour toward the cliffs. The unhorsed warrior tried to creep stealthily out of range, and probably succeeded unhurt, though Zeph took a long shot at him. One of the redskins was holding a hand to his head, as though it felt sore, and the boys concluded that that was where Carter’s little pistol-ball had nicked his pate and half stunned him for a minute.

While Zeph reloaded the guns, Annie and her brother had time to attend to his wound, which was only in the flesh, and had cut no artery or tendon. It hurt, but did not disable, and was well washed and bandaged before Cora warned

them that the Indians seemed to be preparing for another charge.

Once more the cliffs echoed the thud of hoofs, and clatter of gravel, and the horrid whoops and yells, rising into a sort of chant as they drew nearer and nearer, of the Amalekites of this land of the Philistines. It was nerve-shaking, and no wonder the dogs howled and bayed again. Then Andy issued his orders:—

“Zeph, give Cora your rifle and take the shotgun. Cora, rest your gun on that box and fire at the first man who passes that little cedar. Zeph and Carter, you hold your fire till you see whether those behind will turn again. If they do *not*, let 'em have it as they go by. *Now, Cote!*”

Crack! spoke her rifle, and over her shoulder flew Bimber, broken strap and all, straight at the enemy. The foremost horse caught the bullet, with a *thud* at which the girl's heart sickened, then whirled, staggered, fell, and hurled its rider, the chief, to the ground, where he quickly gained his feet, only to find his gun broken in two and nothing left for him to do but drop behind a rock and wriggle away as best he could. Andy's rifle rang out and a splintered bow flew from the hands of the next redskin, just as his arrow was harmlessly loosed.

And there, in the midst of the scrimmage, was

a small black-and-white fury of a dog, racing with the ponies, barking, snapping, and dodging, now lost to sight in the dust, now leaping at some galloping steed.

As before, the rear of the party started to wheel, whereupon Carter's little pistol sparkled, and Zeph stood straight up, heedless of arrows, and with deliberate aim knocked a redskin from his saddle. There was a momentary confusion in their ranks, a chorus of cries, and all reined their horses back and headed straight on after their fellows. Zeph still stood erect, but did not pull trigger, holding his second barrel in reserve.

Just at that instant a pony stumbled, and its swarthy rider, who was busy fitting an arrow to the bowstring, went diving over its head. It was a most unlucky time and place, for as the young Navajo lit heavily on his head and shoulders, knocking half the breath and wits out of him, right there, ready for him, was Bimber,—a dog that knew his business. With a joyous rush he was at the prostrate rider, and the place he fastened his teeth was just the best he could have chosen—the man's right-hand thumb, which in a jiffy was made useless for pulling a bowstring for a long time to come; and so another enemy was put out of the fight. *Bully for Bim!*

Leaping to his feet, the Indian ran howling

toward the last of the band, who stopped a moment, pulled his wounded comrade up behind him, and carried him away.

At that instant Annie suddenly cried out:—
“Listen! What is that?”

She was standing outside her shelter, her face turned up the creek, eastward, where the savages were still visible. All bent their heads and held their breaths. Then came the gladdest sound that has struck human ears since the pibroch was sounded at Lucknow.

A bugle was ringing clear and sharp, though yet far away, sounding the cavalry call to gallop.

Heedless of exposure, every one sprang to their feet, and Zeph leaped upon the parapet, shouting, “*This way! This way!*” at the top of his voice, while Bimber, who had come in frenzied with excitement, danced on his hind legs, and went through the motions of barking without a sound coming from his dry throat.

“Look out!” screamed Cora, in an agony of alarm. “The Indians are coming back!”

“Let them!” Zeph yelled back, jumping up and down with excitement. “Look there!”

And as he pointed up the valley, a small squadron of United States dragoons, sabres swinging high and flashing in the sun, came thundering down the slope, rushing to the rescue. Pell-mell

the astonished Navajos scurried by, some ponies carrying double; but no guns at the fort were loaded ready to stop them, and perhaps would not have been so used if they were, for, after all, our friends were not bloodthirsty.

With a swing of his sword the officer at the head of the squadron waved a salute as the dragoons swept by; but one man, not in uniform, turned out and came galloping toward the little fort.

“Papa!” cried Annie, and springing over the boxes like an antelope, she ran to meet him.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

BRINGS THE TALE TO A HAPPY END

WHY should any one try to describe the joy of such a meeting? The embraces and hand-grips, the tears that would not be kept back, the eager questions so rapidly asked and answered, the thanks to God—what need is there of setting these down?

The soldiers had disappeared, except a corporal, who almost at first had been sent back, as he sang out in passing the happy group, to call up "the lieutenant and the doctor."

"There's another squadron encamped just over the ridge, under Lieutenant Abert and Dr. Kennerly," Mr. Manning explained. "The scouts

heard your firing before the advance troop had unsaddled, and Captain King lit out on the jump. Your mother, let me tell you again, is *all right* — in good health and the guest of the Colonel at Santa Fé.

“You see, we made up our minds you had seen the storm coming and had driven down to the valley and been captured by the Navajos, who had taken your stock and turned you loose afoot. We didn’t believe they had hurt you, so mamma was cheered and hopeful. And you see we were right.”

“Oh, *were* you!” exclaimed Cora, and everybody shouted with laughter. They were too happy to care for small troubles at present.

“Why, father, we’ve got all our animals and the wagon and all our goods — only the grub’s mostly gone — and have had a great time.”

“And wound up with a bee-yu-tiful, gory, roary fight!” shouted Zeph. “By the way, I wonder if I killed that poor devil!” And he ran off to look after the Indian he had knocked off his horse.

So they sat down and told the wonderful story, and Mr. Manning’s surprise and pride grew with every step of the tale.

“By thunder!” he declared. “I never heard of such a thing. It doesn’t seem possible!”

Then bugles answered to bugles, and from east and west the cavalry approached,—a hundred from up the creek, with a pack-train of mules following them; and here was John—to be greeted enthusiastically and rejoice all over again.

“Hannah said, Miss Annie, that she ‘spect’d dey was makin’ pies’ of *you!*”

Then from the west came trotting back all the fifty or so jolly troopers who had continued the chase. These brought back the whole Indian band as prisoners. They had caught them at the ford, and the redskins had thrown up their hands and surrendered without another shot. After all, it was not a regular war-party, but only a wandering band of young braves in search of adventures. They had found one!

Zeph was waiting beside the fallen warrior. The prisoners, riding on their tired horses, each led by a trooper, set up a wild death-chant as they approached the body, but Zeph told them to “shut up,—nobody was dead;” so they lifted his unconscious form and laid him across a horse and carried him to the fort, where the two doctors soon brought him to, picked the buck-shot out of his scalp and shoulder, and told him he’d get well pretty soon. Then they fixed up the thumb Bimber had chewed so opportunely;

and the Captain said the dog should be promoted at once to corporal and get a medal for "distinguished services on the field of battle." Whereat Bim wagged his two inches of tail most appreciatively and lay down to sleep. He was modest, as are all true heroes; and, besides, he was weary.

By this time the officers were introduced, the troop-horses were unsaddled and turned loose to graze under the care of herd-guards (John had taken the mules to a feeding-ground of their own), tents were rising in orderly array, and here and there the cook's fires were blazing. Carter watched these proceedings with vast interest, and then crept up to his father.

"Will they give us something to eat?" he asked anxiously. "I'm awful hungry."

"Pretty soon, my boy. I expect you've been on short rations," was the reply, as he threw his arm about the lad's shoulders and pressed him to his side.

What a meal that was — potatoes! butter! beefsteak! *Well!!* How the officers' eyes opened as they heard the story over again; and what pretty things they said to the young ladies, who blushed less with pleasure at the compliment than with shyness as they remembered how soiled and dishevelled they must look.

Evening was rapidly approaching. A tent was set up for Cora and Annie, and another for the lads, while Mr. Manning took his accustomed quarters with the surgeon. Sentinels were posted, the prisoner placed under night guards, and a jolly session followed around a great fire at headquarters, while the songs and laughter of the troopers in their camp gave a sense of life and company and security which was very grateful to the young wanderers who had so long been facing danger alone. Then was heard the sweet and solemn notes of *taps*, blown upon the two bugles. It echoed from the ruins high on the mesa front, went wandering up the canyons, and floated out across the billowy stretch of willows beneath which a silent river was sweeping away to the sea; and soon the tired but happy adventurers were asleep.

Reveille woke them with a start at sunrise next morning, and the young ladies came out rested and fresh in the good dresses they had been saving in the bottom of their trunk.

"I was fighting for these frocks," said Cora, as she opened the trunk across whose top, a few hours before, she had fired her rifle in genuine battle.

"Oh, Cote," cried Annie, whirling her sister around and kissing her, "you were *so* brave!

I think you were just made for a soldier's wife. I'm jealous of you already. *Isn't* the lieutenant nice!"

"Nan, Nan! You're dreadful!"

Mr. Manning was in haste to climb the mesa and see some of the marvels of which he had heard, and the officers were equally eager to go with him. Andy's leg was too stiff and sore, and Annie and Carter were content to stay below; but Cora and Zeph were willing guides, and after breakfast the camp was left in charge of a sergeant, John and the head packer were called, and the party slowly climbed the stairways and listened to the story of how each difficulty was overcome. Cora said the thing could never have been done without Zeph and the others, while Zeph declared the success was wholly due to Cora's pluck and wit.

While the gentlemen walked over to the ruins on the Butte, and looked curiously at the empty basin of the pond, John and the packer planned how to get the wagon down from the height, and decided on a method of lowering it over the ledges by ropes.

"You could never have handled that wagon-top, Andy," said Mr. Manning, when he returned, "let alone getting the body and running-gear through those narrow passages."

"I know it, sir, but I didn't think it worth while to say so till the last minute. I meant to keep up their courage as long as I could."

Now, however, there was no lack of help. A squad of men was sent up, and by nightfall had brought everything down, bringing the remainder of the cargo and the wheels by hand, and lowering the heavy wagon-body over one cliff after another by ropes. Early next morning, therefore, the ambulance was standing on its wheels by the headquarters, as good as new, with all its cargo in its proper place aboard.

"To think," exclaimed Captain King, in admiration, "that these young people were able not only to save themselves under such hard circumstances, but to bring off all their stock, vehicles, and baggage! Manning, I congratulate you on your sons—and especially on your daughters," he added gallantly, lifting his forage cap. "Gentlemen," he called to everybody standing near, "three cheers for the Misses Manning!"

And they were given with a will.

Meanwhile a ceremony had been taking place in camp. The Indian prisoners were gathered in a circle, and through one of the Mexican pack-train men, who understood the Navajo language, they were questioned and lectured. They said

they lived on a river about a dozen miles below, and were not at war with the white people — were very sorry, and all that. Captain King was told of this, and went over and talked to them. He scolded them well, took away their blankets, weapons, and horses (except one pony for the wounded man), and turned them loose to foot it home, where he knew (and *they* knew) they would be still worse punished by the scoffing and ridicule of their village.

And just as they were going Mr. Manning called the chief, a fine-looking young barbarian, to him, and after talking with him a few moments gave him a light rifle to replace the old gun broken when he pitched off the horse Cora had shot from under him.

“I’d rather have that chap for a friend than an enemy,” said the ex-captain of dragoons as the smiling Indian strode away. “He tells me his name is Ouray, and that he is not a Navajo at all, but a Ute, just visiting the village down below.”

The captain proposed to start that afternoon and make a short march to a fine camping-place five miles eastward; and after lunch camp was struck, the pack-animals given their burdens, the four travelled mules hitched into the ambulance, and riding animals were saddled. Andy climbed

rather stiffly into the ambulance as passenger, Annie was lifted to Chestnut's back by Lieutenant Abert, and Zeph gathered up the reins as Cora took her seat by his side.

"All ready!" said Captain King. The bugler sounded "Boots and Saddles!" the troopers mounted all together and swung into orderly column-of-fours, their sabres clinking merrily, and the homeward march was begun.

"Captain King," asked Mr. Manning, as they rode slowly beside the ambulance at the head of the column, "you are a man of science, as well as a soldier of experience in the West; how do you account for the sudden failure of that big spring?"

"It is evident to my mind," the officer replied, "that the chasm cut by the cloud-burst, and which became a permanent waterway, was so much deepened by the floods from the subsequent storms, and especially that last one, that it finally tapped the underground source of the spring, and so suddenly cut off the supply."

"So much for Whalpi's rain-gods!" exclaimed Zeph.

"Oh, tell us," Annie exclaimed. "Did you see or hear anything of the old priest of the Mokis?"

"Not a trace, my dear."

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